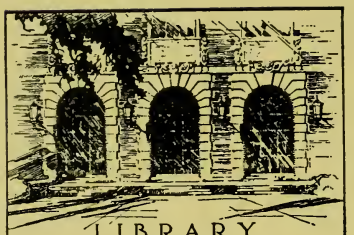
The Woman He Loved

by

A. N. Homer



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THE WOMAN HE LOVED.

THE WOMAN HE LOVED.

A Novel.

BY

A. N. HOMER.

"She was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
Which terminated all."

BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE WOMAN HE LOVED.

CHAPTER I.

HIS WRAITH.

A YEAR and more had passed since the day when Gerard Clarencourt bade good-bye to England, and sailed, in company with Colonel Bethune, for the dark continent. The ice-bound roads had thawed under the genial influence of warmer weather, the crocus and snowdrop had come and gone, and the coppice of elms, which skirted the grounds of the old manor house of Clifford's Wood, boasted of a new generation of rooks, whose homely caws re-echoed through the moss-grown, leafy aisles. The sickle had laid low the golden, full-eared corn, and the harvest had been gathered in to the glad ringing laughter of the reapers'

voices. Wintry winds had whistled through the leafless hedges, and sighed and moaned through the great arched oaks, whose lordly trunks had stood the blasts of many a blinding storm, when the minute gun had boomed its piteous call for aid, heard high above the roaring of the breakers which beat upon the half-sunk rocks in angry milk-white foam. The robin's scarlet breast and twittering notes had given place to the gladsome songs of thrush and lark, for the spring had come again. But even that brief lapse of time had worked many and remarkable changes in the thriving little seaside town of Sidcombe. With the bursting of the leaf it, too, seemed to have emerged from the chrysalis of its pristine state of sleepy indifference to the great world around it into the full-blown butterfly existence of a small but fashionable watering-place. Doubtless, the change had been taking place, though imperceptibly, for years, until suddenly it sprung into life. People who had money at their disposal had grown weary of the time they had spent each year

amidst crowds of pleasure seekers, the beach rendered untenable by swarming contingents of servants, armed with bags and bottles, bent upon making a day of it, though they were perforce obliged to beguile the hours by amusing the squadrons of children committed to their charge, rather than with their lovers, who, as a balm to their aching hearts, quaffed sherbet by the quart, and broke Aunt Sally's nose with deadly precision. They had grown sick of it, and bent upon enjoying a few weeks of quiet where the beauties of nature were to be had in exchange for noise and dust, had hit upon Sidcombe. On the summit of the cliff at the head of the identical path whose tortuous windings had been trodden by Lilian Fabyn on that evening when she had wounded her soft feet in her scramble over the jagged rocks to save the life of her favourite Blenheim, stood a solitary figure—that of a man. He seemed to be deep in thought, absorbed in himself. The golden volume of light, which had wellnigh run its daily

course, shone full upon his face, and revealed the well-remembered features of Gerard Clarencourt. What brought him here ? Such a question is very natural, but it is easy to answer it. A sickening sense of despair had entered his heart, a dread lest by his prolonged absence he might for ever lose sight of that ray of hope, infinitesimally small though it might be, that pole-star whose love he yet hankered after with all the powerful yearnings of his passionate nature—his wife. Pride had borne him out in his sudden determination to leave her, and, as he had told himself, for ever. Pride and wounded *amour propre* had supported him in his hasty resolve to place many thousand leagues of ocean between himself and the woman who had befooled him into an ill-assorted marriage, but pride was no match for love, coupled with a keenly sensitive conscience. When in the saddle, riding at headlong speed in hot pursuit of cattle-stealing bands of hostile natives, he had seemed to see that fair, voluptuous

form he longed to clasp in his strong arms. Then, when the night had come, and tired with hardships of the day, he lay stretched out at full length beside the smouldering camp fire, in that vast awe-inspiring stillness of the African desert, broken only by the cries of ravenous beasts of prey—*then*, when memory could travel back and conjure with its aid *the past*, pride broke down and he surrendered to the great desire which burned within his heart, to breathe the same air, live in the same land, and perhaps—who knew?—gaze once more into the face he loved, and could never banish from his heart. Many a night, when, hushed in sleep, his comrades sought the rest they so much needed, he had lain awake, and tears of penitence had coursed his cheeks for that rash act which in his heart he deprecated. Why had he left her? Why had he not lived the life that he had chosen? Why had he not, with love, gentle words, and kindly touches, forced her, despite herself, to own

him as the lord of all she had to give. Ah, why? Reflections such as these ever come too late. Remorse is the hound, sharp-fanged and fleet of foot, which dogs us in our race through life, and with unerring skill scents out our sins and failings, and gives up the chase only when death has robbed it of its righteous prey. And so Gerard had come back again, urged on by that nameless something which impelled him to seek relief by returning to the land where dwelt his idol. He had silenced the small, still voice which had whispered that if he wished to forget her it was better that he should go anywhere or do anything rather than secure a berth on a homeward-bound steamer, and subject himself to the possibility of meeting her when he was least prepared for it. Was it not weakness on his part? Did it not prove that he wished to bury the past—retrace his steps—make all the atonement in his power, and (if such a thing were possible) forget and forgive? No! he told himself a thousand times, *no!*

He could never forget what had occurred; besides, Ada did not love him, and that was a sufficient guarantee that the breach which separated them was too wide ever to be bridged over. Only he would like to learn something of her; would wish to ascertain that she possessed the wherewithal to supply her daily wants, and even to furnish her with the luxuries so necessary to one carefully nurtured and accustomed to every comfort that money could buy. Then, certain intelligence communicated to him by his solicitors had distressed him, and furnished him with an excuse for pursuing the line of action he had determined upon. The sum he had ordered to be paid to Mrs. Clarencourt had been sent as instructed, but after the third instalment the letter which had contained the usual cheque had been returned through the dead letter office, and all further attempts on the part of the firm to discover the whereabouts of the lady had been attended with failure. What could he think? Even at that moment she might be in penury, and after all (accord-

ing to her own words) it was, to a certain extent, through him, for by her marriage she had forfeited all right to the annuity left to her so long as she remained a widow. Such a thought was not to be borne; anything but that; so he had shaken hands with his new-found comrades (and jolly good fellows they were, too), set his face towards the coast, and had felt his nerves tingle, and an unspeakable joy enter his heart, when once more he stood upon the deck of the English mail boat, and heard the rough voices of the sailors join in a rousing homeward-bound chorus, as they bid good-bye to the Cape Town girls, and set sail for the Kentish cliffs. He had been home but one day, and the conversation he had held with his legal advisers had not tended to improve his spirits, since they had pointed out to him the difficulties which must be overcome before they could ascertain the address of a lady of whom they had entirely lost sight for several months. However, he had set in motion the best machinery he could command, and had the satisfaction of

knowing that he had done all in his power to trace her. So a feeling of greater contentment than he had experienced for many a long day stole in upon him as he stood on the cliffs, every undulation, frowning precipice, and breezy upland of which was fraught with recollection of the past. The glories of the day were wellnigh over, for the brightly tinted clouds alone were left to mark where the sun had set, and the brown-sailed fisher craft were stealing one by one from out the harbour, bound to the far-away fishing grounds, where they toiled till the morning light. Who has not stood upon some lofty eminence, and gazed upon the peaceful grandeur of nature steeped in the quiet solemnity of the deepening twilight, upon the mighty overhanging rocks, in whose dark crannies, high in mid air, the white-winged sea-gull rests, far away, on the shadowy horizon, the snowy canvas of the outward-bounder, and down beneath one's feet, that ever-heaving restless mass of shimmering sea? At such a time there is shed around us an awe-inspiring silence amidst

which we seem to recall the strain of some sweet-tuned organ and the ringing voices of the choir, as their tongues repeat the words, "How manifold are thy works!" until a train of calm thoughts dawn upon the mind, at rest with God and man. At length Gerard seemed as though his lungs had drunk in their fill of the strong salt air; perhaps he wearied of his own thoughts, and wished for the society of others. Be that as it may, he turned his back upon the sea, and struck off down the path which led by the nearest cut to Clifford's Wood.

In the drawing-room of the stately mansion owned by Sir George Fabyn, Lilian and her mother sat alone. Her ladyship was conversing in the manner and tone peculiar to her, which usually savoured strongly of a desire to domineer, and was moreover seldom entirely free from a suspicion of what is vulgarly, though expressively, termed bumptiousness. Just then she chanced to be holding forth on a matter which happened to be nearest her heart, so her

natural propensities were called into full play.

"The time will come," she said, "when you will think as I do on this subject."

"I cannot bring myself to do so, mother," replied Lilian, with her pale face, upon which the finger of ill health was but too plainly marked, half averted.

"But you will, my dear; you do."

Lilian felt she did not, but she was too weak to assert her opinions, and was gradually beginning to lean towards the fatal mistake of permitting herself to be wearied out by constant harpings upon the same subject, and for the sake of peace to think of succumbing from sheer lack of force of character.

"You see," continued her ladyship in the same humdrum tones; "it is no easy matter to find a suitable *parti* for one born and bred as you are. Your father's family is one of the oldest in England; it dates back, my dear, clearly to that of Sir Geoffrey de Fabyne, who came over to this country with William the Conqueror, and who (as the

legend goes) disposed of his rival by throwing him into the pond near the lime tree walk." Since that story was amongst the earliest that Lilian could remember, and as she had heard a full and graphic account of it hundreds of times, a repetition needed no comment. So Lady Fabyn resumed the thread of her discourse, though perhaps it never occurred to her before doing so to throw a light upon the origin of the blue blood from which she derived *her* noble existence. Doubtless she was of opinion that her husband possessed enough and to spare of that glorious *sang bleu* to save her the trouble of dilating upon the long-sounding names and titles which belonged to her side of the house.

"I have always thought most highly of Mr. Ledsham. He is so amiable, so entirely free from the conceit which to me spoil a man, and his position is undeniable."

Ah! there was the rub; that was the sticking plaster which covered so completely a multitude of sins. Her ladyship felt it and paused for breath.

"I cannot think with you, mother; I am not so sure that he possesses the good qualities for which you give him credit, and I *am* sure of one thing, that I do not care for him."

"Lilian, my child, believe me, for I can speak from experience. I have never known —I mean, I never loved your father when I married him, and yet you see how well we get on together. Mr. Ledsham dotes upon you—hangs upon your lightest word —worships the very ground you walk upon. No wish of yours will ever remain ungratified if money and his affection for you can satisfy them. How can I possibly have anything but your happiness and welfare at heart, and in advising this step, I do so with the firm conviction that it will be for your future benefit. Lilian, you have been a difficult child to bring up. Many an anxious and sleepless night you have caused me, but I have loved you through it all. Will you not prove to me that you are willing to do something in return, by follow-

ing my counsels? You will never regret it, my child, never, and you will make your poor mother happy."

Lady Fabyn had worked up her speech well, and by way of a crowning piece of emphasis ended it by enveloping her fat face in the folds of her cambric handkerchief. It was only natural that Lilian should be deeply affected by such a forcible appeal to her feelings. Yet she would never have done as she did but for one thought, which is so common to people who are in a delicate state of health, a fixed foreboding that she should not live long. Why should she not consent? It would please her mother, and death would rescue her from her promise.

"Lilian, have you no answer to make me?"

"Yes, mother."

"And it is?" Lady Fabyn trembled; she so much feared another refusal to comply with her views, and she had had many upon this point.

"That it shall be as you wish. I will accept him."

"You promise me?"

"Yes."

"You have made me happy, my darling. Words cannot express all I feel. Kiss me, Lilian, for now I know you are my own dear daughter, ready to do much for my sake. I will leave you now, as I must give some instructions about dinner and I have just time to dress before Mr. Ledsham arrives."

Not one word of all this had Lilian heard. She was conscious that she suffered herself to be kissed, and returned the caress, but her mind had wandered away from her own life and its surroundings. Memory recalled to her Gerard's face, as she had last seen it, so handsome, kindly, and true. Why had he never learnt her secret? And yet she had scarce known it herself then. But they would never meet now—never be anything to each other, and her love, like herself, would go down to the old family vault

under the arching elms, and he be none the wiser. Such ideas had found favour with her of late, she had felt so thoroughly miserable, without interest in the ordinary events of her daily life. The news she had received in the first instance of Gerard's safe return to England had buoyed her up with wild hopes which she had freely encouraged, but the blow which dashed them to the ground when she learned that he had gone abroad again, without any attempt to see her, she had never recovered from. Her nature was in itself essentially dependent upon others. She could not know happiness without love, and her life (since apparently, the being for whom she craved was denied to her) was a blighted one, and she had grown to wonder for what earthly purpose she had been born, and to school herself into believing that death itself would be preferable to an existence such as hers. Thinking thus, and trying to feel a sense of certainty, that if not in this world, at all events in that shadowy hereafter, she should

meet again the man she loved. She turned mechanically towards the window. The sight that met her gaze made her start and tremble with fear, rooted her to the chair on which she sat, and deprived her entirely of the power of speech. It was the figure of a man looming distinctly against the pale amber twilight of the evening sky. Rapid as was her glance, it left her no doubt as to its being Gerard's form, and yet she knew he was in Africa. There, before her stood his wraith, come, as she had heard in other instances, as a silent warning that he was dead. Gerard dead! It was too awful, the sudden shock too great for her weakened constitution to support, and with a low moan, she swooned away. That moan, so harrowing in its depth of mental suffering, penetrated to Gerard's ears, for it was he, in flesh and blood. He could not be mistaken as to whence the sound proceeded, and the next moment he had broken the fastening which closed the two long sashes of the French window, and was bending

over Lilian. Lady Fabyn had told what may safely be termed a white lie, when she left her daughter on the pretence of issuing certain household instructions, and her first act on leaving the room was to go straight to her boudoir and ring for her maid.

"Céleste."

"Yes, miladi."

"When Mr. Ledsham comes, see that he is shown in here. Do you understand? And at once, remember."

"Miladi's orders shall be obeyed."

Faithfully they were; and her ladyship had not long to wait, for in ten minutes the Honourable Jim made his appearance, accurately attired in the most correct type of evening "get up," his coat being one at which Poole himself could not have cavilled.

"Ah! how d'ye do, Lady Fabyn?"

"Shut the door tight." Ledsham did as he was requested, apparently not at all astonished at the oddness of the greeting accorded to him.

"'*Lady Fabyn!*'" continued his hostess, "stuff and nonsense. You may call me 'mother' in future, though you don't deserve it. Upon my word, if you'd made love to me for months as you have to Lilian, I should have thought you an out-and-out 'duffer.'"

"Really, this is a very astounding way of talking to a fellow; quite too singular. But what does it all mean?"

"What *should* it mean but that Lilian loves you and has done so all along."

"Loves *me!* Oh, nonsense. I've proposed to her no end of times, and—and I rather flatter myself I'm good at that sort of thing. Know my way about, don't you know?"

"Yes, I daresay you all do; at least, you say so. But if you'll run down to the drawing-room, instead of wasting time by arguing, you will find Lilian there, alone; and she will accept you."

"Egad, then I'm in luck's way. Thanks a thousand times for your share in this."

"You, of course, must know nothing."

"Not a syllable, trust me."

The Honourable Jim could wait no longer. He was anxious to learn his fate; for, like most men, as his prospects of success had become more and more remote, his desire to succeed had proportionately increased, until he began to fancy that, as he phrased it, "he was deuced hard hit this time and no mistake." The effect of Lilian's words when she had refused him in the boat, though considerably more than a year ago, had made so deep an impression upon him that he remembered the very tone in which they were delivered, and he had often promised himself that his turn should come, and now, sure enough, it had. He would humble her pride—it would be a balm to his outraged feelings. Arrived at the drawing-room door he paused for a moment to draw breath, re-arrange his tie, and give, if possible, a yet more artistic twirl to his moustache. Then he turned the handle and went in. The sight that met his gaze under the circumstances would have sorely tried even

the godlike patience of Job; and as Ledsham possessed none of his attributes, he exclaimed under his breath, as he beat a hasty retreat:

"Oh! the devil! done brown! made a fool of by the old lady! Clarencourt, too! My luck! Curse him! But I should like to know where, in the name of all the saints in the calendar, he has sprung from?"

When Gerard had ascertained that Lilian was in a dead faint, his first impulse was to ring the bell for assistance; his second, to pause and come to the hasty conclusion that to alarm the whole household would not be advisable, since it would place him in a decidedly awkward position; his third, to kneel by her side, and if possible aid her recovery; and just then Jim Ledsham had come upon the scene. Slowly Lilian began to regain consciousness, and at length opened her eyes, but most assuredly she would have fainted again at the sight of Gerard bending over her, had he not chanced to speak.

"Do you feel better, Lilian?"

The old familiar tones of his voice acted like a spell upon her.

"You here, Mr. Clarencourt? Am I dreaming?"

"Never wider awake in your life. Yes, it is I in sober earnest, and it seems to me that by good fortune I arrived in the nick of time. Let me help you to the sofa. Take my arm; you had better lie down, and listen to me while I tell you everything. Though first, let me ask you, what caused your indisposition."

Lilian's brain was reeling. What answer must she make?

"I don't know. Perhaps the room was too hot," she stammered.

"You have been ill."

"Yes."

"So I was informed on my arrival."

"I—I heard that you were abroad."

"Yes, I was there less than a month ago. But you know a month means much in these days of steam. I ran down from London on Wednesday by the night mail, so you see I

have only been at Clifford's Wood twenty-four hours. Not long before I came to look you up."

Each word in that heedless sentence was like the cheering rays of the sun as its bright beams appear again to chase away the gloom of night. He had not forgotten her, his actions proved that beyond a doubt. Might she not even hope that he would learn to love her at last? The warm, rich blood coursed through her veins, and mounted to her fair, soft cheek. Her heart beat with the dull, steady thud of a sledge-hammer, each stroke of which was felt by her as her thoughts ran riot.

"What ages seem to have passed since we met—since last I stood within this room!" continued Gerard, as his eyes fell upon each well-remembered painting. The old and valuable china which stocked the shelves of quaint inlaid cabinets, after the style of Louis Quinze; even the very gilt and vellum bound copies of poems, the albums, and modern photographs, in plush and leathern frames,

were all familiar to him. But the thought was one of bitterness. Another scene rose up before him — that of a drawing-room too, but in an Indian bungalow, half buried in palms, jasmine creepers, and bell-shaped tropical flowers of richest hue. So plainly he could see it, white walled, and cool midst the emerald verdure, with its half-closed venetians and verandah, its punkahs and tatti wallahs. He could see it all, even the dusky faces of the servants, every article of furniture, *her* piano, where it stood near her books and music, her favourite lounge, her *face* with its halo of golden hair, and her eyes, those eyes, so blue, and to him fairer than the most beauteous sky that ever graced the heavens. And, oh God! he could hear the rich, ringing tones of her voice, clearly as on that first night when she had sung to him and stirred his very soul to its depths. And now—now, it was all over. His wife, yet nothing to him, only powerful, while life should last, to blight his days, and render them hours accursed with the memories he could

not forget, the love he could not stifle. Sadness held sway over him, tears rushed into his eyes, which the light of the gloaming hid from the girl at his side. But he was not alone, and none must ever learn his secret misery. He rose hastily. "Now that you are yourself again I must be off. It would never do for me to be discovered here, after my unceremonious way of effecting an entrance, or I shall be credited with having sinister designs upon the plate, at least."

"Not yet. Why hurry?" pleaded Lilian.

"Really, I *must* go. But I promise you, you will have enough of me," he answered with forced gaiety.

"Come as often as you can. Father—we shall all be glad to see you," stammered Lilian, as her gaze fell before his. He, the while, thinking of his grief, and she of the love she bore him.

"That I will, I promise you."

"One thing I have forgotten to ask you. How was it that you were so near when I—I fainted?"

"Oh, a mere chance. I had wandered through the gardens, hoping to meet some one from whom I could inquire of you, and thus had strolled on to the terrace, having determined to ring the bell and leave my card. The beauty of the evening made me pause to admire the view; lucky I did so, before this window, or I might not have heard your cry. And now I must be going.

Lilian was conscious that he pressed her hand, and that she murmured something, what she could not tell, but he was gone, and the room seemed darker still without him as she sat down to collect her thoughts, which whirled in hopeless confusion through her mind. An amusing little *tableau* had been enacted, which she knew nothing of, whilst she had been engaged in drinking in each word that fell from Gerard's lips. And the way of it was this. Ledsham, on finding that his lady love was far too busy for his liking, full of wrath and bent upon demanding some explanation for the trick

which he considered had been played upon him, was about to hasten back to Lady Fabyn's *boudoir*, when he stumbled upon Sir George. He was too much exasperated to keep anything to himself, and accordingly, in very few words, had blurted out the whole sum and substance of his grievances.

"Let them alone," Sir George had said gravely, at length.

"Let them alone? The devil! And to what end, I should like to know? Am I to stand tamely by, and see the girl I have been led to suppose I should marry, spooned, and walked off under my very eyes? Deuce take me! Sir George, you must be dreaming," burst out Ledsham.

"Not at all. Listen to me, Ledsham. You're a good fellow. I know it now. Suppose I should tell you I have reason to believe my daughter loves Clarencourt, and that he is not indifferent to her."

"Why hang it, I *shouldn't* believe it. She can't love *everybody!*"

"What do you mean?"

"Precisely what I say. I omitted to tell you before, but this very evening, Lady Fabyn herself told me that Lilian loved me, and would accept my offer of marriage. Now may the devil take me if I see why I should be bowled out of the field because this fellow happens to turn up."

Sir George's face clouded over. From the revelation made to him by Lilian, in the villa abroad, he had reason to believe that the whole happiness of her life was at stake, and he fancied he saw clearly before him every chance of the wish of his heart being gratified, could he but frustrate the determined opposition he felt he should have to encounter from his wife. That obstacle removed he had, he considered, every reason to hope that events would turn out as he wished.

"Look here, Ledsham; you and I will discuss this matter together quietly in my study after dinner. Meanwhile, not a word about what has transpired to my wife."

Ledsham assented, though with visible

reluctance, and for the moment the subject was dropped. And Clarencourt, all unconscious of the *fracas* he had so inadvertently been the means of causing, returned to Clifford's Wood to brood over his own troubles, which seemed to have enveloped him like a cloud—never to clear away again—not even with the aid of that staunch ally and friend of the heart-sick—time.

CHAPTER II.

MEMORY.

And how had it fared meanwhile with Ada Devereaux?—by which name it may be as well to speak of her, since she had decided to adopt it again on finding that what she had been so slow to believe was an established fact, and that Gerard had left her. She could hardly credit the words which had so tersely informed her of his decision; but when she had fully grasped the meaning of the rash step he had taken, the effect upon her was great. All her life her pride had known few falls; it had steadily grown and strengthened with her years. She had been taught to consider herself beautiful in her earliest girlhood, and the teaching had been impressed upon her mind, too forcibly for her to forget, by the corroboratory evidence of every mirror in

which her own reflection was portrayed. Men told her she was lovely, and she had lent her ear and listened to their smooth-tongued adulation, and nothing loth, she had believed and grown accustomed to the homage so freely offered. It gave her that which she coveted most, *power*. Midst a crowd of men, handsome or ugly, rich or poor, as the case might be, she had loved to fix her eyes upon any one which it pleased her to single out, and think that did she but see fit, her loveliness could conquer and bring him to her feet, a slave, to lure on to declarations of mad love, or freeze, with a haughty curl of her lips and a few biting sarcasms, the well of sentiment she had called into being. Proofs of her triumphs had never been wanting, and the time arrived when she had learnt to look upon a man in the light of a puppet. But it was a new and terrible sensation to her when she awoke to the truth that at length she had met one who, though young in years, and with the right to call her *his* before the world, was

man enough to turn from the witcheries of her glance, and thrust her aside as a thing unworthy of him, since he could not command her heart. The trial had been a bitter one when she had found that there was nothing left for her but to swallow the nauseous pill, whether she would or no. At first, the good effects of this absolute shattering of her pride had been wellnigh submerged by the deep and unrelenting hatred which she attempted to school herself into believing she fostered for her husband. But there she was foiled, for her better nature asserted itself, and ran counter to her wishes. Hatred, revenge, anything on which she could fall back as an antidote, a balm to soothe her outraged feelings, would have been grateful to her, but fortunately her temperament was a passionate rather than a malicious one, and she was powerless to harbour evil sentiments after the first flush of rage had evaporated, and as the weeks rolled by she had found herself taking her own actions to task, and blaming herself for her

share in the sorrow she well knew she had caused another. At first, for two or three months, she had received and made use of the money sent to her by Gerard's agents, then that slight connection between them had been broken, for one morning a black-edged letter had informed her of the death of her mother, her sole surviving relative, and that the small income upon which she had subsisted was at her disposal, and she had told herself that not another shilling of *his* money should pay for a single want of hers. The letters directed to her had been returned unopened, and she had changed her place of abode, leaving no clue by which she could be traced. What could all this mean? Such a step was strangely at variance with what might have been expected from a woman who had given such strong evidence of a love for money. Ah, the tiny worm at the core of the apple causes it to decay, and the germs of love once sown in a woman's heart blossom and expand as though they were seeds of mustard, the rapidity of whose growth

it is not easy to understand. Long, sleepless nights of solitude, and days of weary length, had done much by way of alteration. And then, as if to crown it all, a painful illness, during which her life was despaired of, was undergone, and when she was pronounced out of danger she found an infant nestling in her bosom; a boy with *his face*, and thus a link between Gerard and herself was forged. Slowly it dawned upon her, though the sensation was a new one, that for the first time in her life *she loved*. And having made up her mind upon that point, Ada told herself that the next best thing to seeing Gerard was to go and live near the spot where she knew he had spent most of his years. There could be no danger of discovery in such a step. No one knew her, and she could resume her former name of Devereaux, and he would never be the wiser, since he was abroad. With her to think was to act, and so it came about that, after bargaining and arranging matters with a local house-agent at Sidcombe, she had

agreed to rent a small house, with certain stipulations as to leaving it at a short notice, upon which point she had insisted. Thus the thread of her life had been woven by that unseen mysterious might which rules the destinies of men, and she, with her pride broken and her arrogance curbed, had bent her stiff neck submissively, and yielded to the influence of a growing passion, whose toils, as the hours passed, wound more and more tightly about her heart The home in which the last few months of her life had been spent stood back some few hundred yards from the main road, which in its windings led to the principal entrance of The Towers. A clump of trees, beeches, purple and copper, bright green-leaved limes, and gnarled, crooked-stemmed thorns, hid the cottage (for it was little better) completely from the gaze of the curious passer by. Before the door lay a neatly-kept, old-fashioned garden, the size of which was sufficient proof that the land was of no great value since so much could be devoted to one house. Broad pasture lands, dotted with clumps of

Spanish chestnut trees, led down to the margin of the stream, the banks of which were overhung thickly with larches. Jagged rocks and huge, moss-grown boulders had broken up the rugged bed of the river into deep, still pools and foaming shallows for some short distance, but beyond that flowed a stretch of smooth, eddying water, lost to sight at length as it disappeared under a great bank of rounded pebbles on its course to the sea. Of late, since her sojourn in Sidcombe, Ada Devereaux had grown strangely indifferent to the sayings and doings of the outside world. It was impossible that a woman of her type could remain altogether unnoticed, but to the few residents in the neighbourhood who had called upon her, convinced that by so doing they were conferring a favour, she had distinctly given to understand that solitude was much more to her taste than the hollow courtesies extended to her. The vapid society conversation, which she knew she should have to encounter, had no longer any interest for her, and she chose rather to frequent the

lonely paths, where, with her own sad thoughts, she could listen to the murmur of the water as it gurgled on its way, or to train the tangled masses of red-leaved creepers and *gloire de Dijon* roses which strayed in wild luxuriance over the four walls and clambered even to the roof and chimneys of her little domain. The yellow light of the declining sun tipped with a golden hue the topmost branches of the larch trees, reminding one somewhat of the feathery foliage of the date palm, or rather, of the stems on which the fruit clusters. She was returning home after one of her solitary rambles when her ear caught the deep tones of a man's voice.

"Mrs. Devereaux." Yes; she could not be mistaken, it was her own name that was spoken. She could see no one at first, but the next moment a figure scrambled up the bank, and advanced towards her.

"Who would have thought it? Then my eyes have not deceived me, and it is really you."

"Colonel Steele!" she exclaimed in her surprise.

"At your service, and delighted to see you. Such an unexpected pleasure more than amply repays me for having stood up to my waist in water half the day, and exhausted the contents of my fly book, to say nothing of my patience, and all to no purpose. For I don't mind confessing to you, my creel is as destitute of a single fin as when I began to fish this morning."

"Thanks for the compliment. But who would have dreamt of meeting you, and in an out of the way place like Sidcombe!"

"Another instance of how small the world is," answered Steele, as he walked by her side with his rod flung over his shoulder, a cloth shooting cap perched jauntily on one side of his head, and a considerable portion of his rough tweed trousers hidden by a huge pair of india-rubber waders.

"Why, would you believe it? When I first went out to Bombay," he continued, "on the day we landed I met no less than three old

friends, two of whom had actually been at Eton with me. But pardon me for being personal; you look paler than when last I saw you. Your presence in Sidcombe is not due, I trust, to illness and the necessity for recruiting?"

Ada Devereaux coloured as a certain unpleasant thought occurred to her, but speedily regained her composure, as she remembered the reasons that existed for appearing calm.

"Thanks, I am quite well, I assure you. But now, tell me, when did you leave India?"

"You tax my memory when you ask for dates. But, yes, it is as near as possible three months, I should say, since I left the Hooghly."

"You are on leave, colonel?"

"Yes, I had grown sick of soldiering and being alternately broiled and frozen, which was our luck when in Afghanistan. I was haunted too by visions of the old country and the faces of certain people whom I wanted to see again, so I applied for absence

on the strength of a lull and the chance of peace for the time being, bundled my traps together, and here I am."

Colonel Steele glanced at Ada Devereaux as he concluded his explanation. He had always admired her, in fact had experienced as many tender feelings for her as he had ever known for any woman. He was essentially a *roué*, his face betrayed as much, and certainly he had never belied the character written in the expression of his eyes and in his full, sensual lips. His skin was tanned a dusky brown from constant outdoor exercise under an Indian sun, and his figure, which was about middle height, was spare and bony. Such was the man whose villainy had been instrumental in procuring Geoffrey Carelesse's dismissal from the ranks of the British army. And in the pause of some seconds which intervened, he ran his eyes rapidly over Ada Devereaux's form, noted the full, graceful curve of her bust and shapely waist, in short took her in at a glance, as he would have said, and came to the conclusion that she was

still far and away the finest woman it had ever been his luck to meet. And he was not slow in making up his mind that this time, at least, he would have a fair chance of trying the effect of his blandishments upon her without the fear of being suddenly ordered away just when he felt that he was beginning to be successful. Here was a delightful opportunity. A lovely woman mewed up in an isolated south coast watering-place, shut off from the possibility of much society, and therefore with all her time at her own disposal. Steele's mouth positively watered as he drew a little sketch, after his own heart, of charming *têtes-à-tête* to the tuneful melody of the rippling river, walks down by the sea, on the beach, under the cliffs, returning through the quiet country lanes when the moon was rising in silvery glory above the trees, and—oh, his thoughts would have run on endlessly harping on the same string, had they not been rather rudely interrupted by a question from Ada Devereaux.

"And Mr. Carelesse, what of him, colonel?

Is he well, and still in your regiment?" she inquired.

Steele was taken aback by the abruptness with which he was asked for news of the man he had so foully wronged; but it was only a momentary disadvantage. It would have required a poser to have robbed him of the reserve of oily lies which were ever at his disposal to extricate him from the position in which his own actions had placed him.

"Carelesse! Oh, ay! A good fellow; but I am only able to give a positive answer to your last question. He has left the old corps. What has become of him I am at a loss to say; exchanged into the Cape Mounted, or perhaps a West India regiment, for aught I know to the contrary. His constitution would warrant him in going to the most infernal climate, I should say. Never knew him on the sick list the whole time he was with us."

Steele had permitted the feelings of resentment which he still harboured towards

Geoffrey Carelesse to get the better of his judgment, for it was impossible that his satirical reference to the Cape Rifles and West India corps could pass unnoticed by one as well versed in military matters as his listener. She heard and remembered the remark; but she was no longer the old Ada Devereaux, haughty and resentful, even without just cause. Once upon a time she would have fired up at the unmistakable ring of satire which was so painfully evident; but now she contented herself by asking simply:

"What do you mean?"

"Well, of course, I was joking when I suggested that Carelesse might have joined either of the regiments I mentioned," replied Steele, anxious to repair his error; "but I really have heard nothing of his movements since I saw him last."

The remembrance of that day when Carelesse had stood up and faced the men whom he (Steele) had been the means of bringing together as his judges, struck no chord of regret or qualm of conscience in his cold heart. He

had simply swept him from his path then, as he would again, had he crossed him in any way, or chanced to spoil his game by presenting the smallest obstacle to one of his numerous amours. Not content with the wrongs he had done him, he hated even to hear his name mentioned, and thus he had spoken at random.

"Oh, I merely asked you for news of him *en passant*," resumed Ada quietly.

"Which I regret I cannot supply."

"Perhaps you recollect a great friend of his, Mr. Clarencourt. Have you seen or heard anything of him?"

"Never since I shook hands with him before leaving Calcutta. But what makes you ask?" added Steele, as he noticed what he thought looked suspiciously like a blush mount to her cheek as she made the inquiry.

"Curiosity, I suppose, nothing more. But now you must permit me to say good-bye."

"Ah, my escort wearies you."

"Far from it, I assure you. Friends are the links in life which unite the past to the

present, and though we have seen but little of each other, colonel, we have at least never quarrelled."

"Quarrelled! I should think not," ejaculated Steele forcibly.

"Why, it would not be impossible, you would say if you knew me better," laughed Ada, with a tinge of bitterness marking her accents. She was thinking of that tempest of passion to which she had given vent when Gerard closed the door of their sitting-room at the Langham behind him, and left her, she had grown to fear, for ever. Ah, how she blamed herself now for her conduct towards him from beginning to end! How she had mourned through many a weary day and sleepless night, and prayed as she had never prayed before that God would pardon the wrongs she had done him, and at some future time, though she dreaded to think how long that might be, bring them together again! Whether her face betrayed her thoughts or not, Steele, as he watched her, inwardly determined never to talk of Gerard Clarencourt, if he could

help it, since in his suspicious way he instantly attributed the change in her manner to the abrupt mention of his name.

"Will you give me the opportunity of discovering your defects for myself, since you insist on their existence? Otherwise, I shall remain the unbelieving Jew I now am to the end of my days," he answered.

"Oh, we shall meet somehow. We are sure to run up against each other at every turning in a place like this," she answered quickly, half wishing to be rid of him, and yet tempted, from pure feelings of sentiment, to see him again.

"In any case you cannot dismiss me here, in this lonely place. Surely, you will permit me to——"

"Thanks, it is unnecessary," she answered, interrupting him.

"Dare I venture to inquire why?"

"Because my home for the time being is close by, and as to solitude I like it. You would scarcely credit it, Colonel Steele, but I am an ardent lover of nature, and I am sure

you will agree with me that few districts excel this in loveliness."

"Such must be the case, and of course the country is pretty enough, but wonders will never cease, and the months which have passed must have worked many changes if the haughty Mrs. Devereaux—forgive me if I am wrong in so expressing myself—can have so thoroughly forgotten her triumphs and her love of society as to wish to bury herself and deny the world the pleasure her presence gives it."

"Once more, good-bye, Colonel Steele. I fear such compliments, though doubtless well meant, are lost upon me. Perhaps, if I loved the world, I acquired, by so doing, the knowledge which impels me to fly from its sophistries, and, as you term it, bury myself here, for a time at least." As she spoke she extended her hand.

"Well, you will not doom me to complete exile? When may I have the pleasure of seeing you, and at all events attempting to convince you of your fallacy?"

"It would be useless."

"I am loth to believe it, Mrs. Devereaux. May I call and try? I shall be staying here for some time."

What could she say? She felt she did not like him, yet she could not ignore his request, it would be almost discourteous. No; she would not refuse. This man, who had shaken hands with Gerard, was a minute particle of the chain which bound her by memory to the hours gone for ever.

"I shall be glad to see you. There is the house, or cottage rather, where you will find me, yonder through the trees."

He bowed, and she turned away full of her own bitter thoughts.

"His face, his face," she murmured; "how it brings it all back to me, that first evening when we met!"

And she sought her solitary abode, dark and cheerless to her save for the sole light which had dawned upon her life, as though in mercy to her, his child. She seemed to see again the waving fronds of the palms, the

Burmese pagoda, the limpid waters of the tiny lake, and the moving mass of dark turbaned faces, and to hear the soft strains of "Venetia," as he, whom she did not care for then, bent over her and gazed into her eyes as though he would read her soul.

CHAPTER III.

THE BARONET'S DECISION.

"HANG me if I know what he means," Ledsham was saying to his father, Lord Goddington, as he paced angrily up and down the full length of the morning-room at Breakwood on the day after dining at The Towers.

"Well, if you will condescend to explain the whole affair to me quietly, I shall be in a position to give you advice upon the subject," answered his lordship, who was a small-made, delicate, aristocratic old gentleman, whose age it was no easy matter to determine.

"Why, I thought I had told you the whole story."

"Quite so, but in a way utterly unintelligible to me. If you would sit down, instead of behaving in a manner calculated to impress

one strongly with the idea that you have taken leave of your senses, you would oblige me. I am more deeply concerned in this affair than you, and yet——"

"Well! I like that," interrupted his son. "Why, the girl is to be my wife."

"If you can win her, but should you go on as you are doing now you will, I fear, spoil everything with your blunders."

"How could I prevent Clarencourt turning up? It's just my luck. A murrain on him."

"Why, you have been dangling after her for months, and in my young days such men as Lionel de Rochefort, Berrymore, and Houndslow would have turned the laugh against me to some purpose if I could not have given a better account of a woman's heart in a tenth of the time, and with a fair field too, not to speak of the encouragement and consent of her parents. However, all this is not to the purpose. You must marry her, and I tell you, it does concern me more than yourself."

"Please to explain."

"It is very simple, though I imagined that you were well informed on the point. Perhaps I have kept it more to myself than I should have done, but I remember distinctly impressing upon you, before I left for Cannes, the urgent reasons that existed for your marrying Miss Fabyn. To cut a long tale short, and to explain to you in a few words the position I am placed in, I must tell you that though none know it in the county, this estate is mortgaged to the last shilling. And it is entirely owing to the turn affairs have taken in Ireland. My solicitors informed me that there was every reason to hope that a change for the better would take place. I believed it myself, and thought with them, that with care and economy things would pull round. Instead of that they have gone from bad to worse, and now we could not be placed in a more unfortunate position, and unless you pull this marriage off (or as rich a one, though, since the estates join, I would prefer the Fabyn girl) I must curtail the expenditure in

every way, and live for the remainder of my life on an income miserably inadequate to a man of my position."

"The devil! Is it so bad with us?" replied the Honourable Jim as he faced his father.

"I have said so. And to begin with, I must try to ease the shoe where it pinches most. You are young, Jim, and therefore better fitted to cope with straitened circumstances than I am."

"Well?"

"I shall begin by allowing you about one-half of the sum you have been spending annually."

"In which case I should probably enlist."

"Not a bad idea. It would do you good to see some service. But don't do anything rash, Jim, or without consulting me, mind that."

"It seems to me that you don't care very much what becomes of me."

"A very common sentiment with young fellows of your age. I remember judging of your grandfather in a like manner when I

received a letter from his solicitors, informing me that they had been instructed to diminish my yearly income very considerably, owing to a little peccadillo of mine with Marion de Fleuré. Now, you know, Jim, I am not hard upon you and never have been. Having been young myself I know how to wink at your misdeeds—I cannot think of another name for them at this moment. But one must have money, and I have none, that is the long and short of it. Now, what of Miss Fabyn?"

"I told you. On the strength of Lady Fabyn informing me that Lilian would accept me, I went to the drawing-room. I entered rather quietly, and found her, not as I expected, alone, but with a fellow whom, even in the dusk, I could swear was Clarencourt. Well, I had a row with Sir George, and he promised me an explanation after dinner, but I could get nothing out of him. Whether it was owing to the port or his temper, I know not, but on leaving I told him I would drive over this morning and hear what he had to say. Now you know all, and I'm off,

since time's up and I'm due there, besides I feel deuced anxious about this. Fact is, I'm spoons on Lilian, and I don't think I ever knew it until yesterday. Seeing Clarencourt making the running made me feel bad."

"Of course, of course, very natural; under the circumstances extremely so," answered his lordship tersely, wheezing out the words whenever a fit of coughing which had suddenly seized him would permit.

"You seem seedy this morning," remarked Ledsham, as he prepared to leave the room. "You must be careful. Winds cut you up like a knife. Trying time of year, spring."

Lord Goddington put up his gold eyeglasses, and regarded his son steadily through them for some seconds.

"My ailments have nothing whatever to do with the subject in question, so we will dismiss them, if you please, for the time being. I wish to be acquainted, immediately upon your return, with any news you may have to communicate. Good-morning," continued his lordship, grimly, as he hobbled away, giving

vent to a series of sniffs and grunts, which had the effect of convincing his observant offspring that he was in anything but an amiable frame of mind.

"Gov'nor got a fit of the blues, or something worse," cogitated the Honourable Jim, as he stepped into his dog-cart, settled himself on the box-seat, and, with his bright bay (for which, by the by, and other like luxuries, he had yet to "square up" with the Jews) well in hand, sped down the avenue in the direction of The Towers.

"Only woman I ever failed to do with as I chose," he said to himself, as he flicked the hedgerows with his whip. "And, by Jove, I have never forgotten that day on the lake. She looked like a perfect little fury when I put my arm round her waist. Not sure that I've forgiven her, either. But we shall be even on that score yet, or my name's not Jim Ledsham," he added, as he swung in through the lodge gates, in twenty minutes after quitting Breakwood alighted at his destination, and was ushered into the study. Sir

George, who was waiting for him, rose from his writing-table on his entrance, and shook him by the hand. The baronet was not at all the sort of man to beat about the bush. He had had high words with his wife, but for once in his life, much to her astonishment, had proved that when he so pleased he was capable of holding his own, and he had made up his mind that he would have his way—at least, upon one point—namely, what he considered Lilian's welfare.

"Well, Ledsham, I have decided," he said, coming to business at once, "and I may tell you that I do not wish my daughter's actions fettered in the smallest degree. She is not strong, as you know, and any worry would kill her. You're too good a fellow to want her to——"

"Pardon me, Sir George, for interrupting you," broke in Ledsham stiffly; "it does not seem to be a question of what I want, or, hang it, I should consider that I have the best right to Lilian's hand, and therefore would be desirous of your aid and consent.

May I speak to her myself on the subject?"

"It grieves me, Ledsham, I assure you, to feel obliged to deny you what at least would seem your due, and I do so only on the ground that I wish to spare my daughter pain. Besides, I am of the opinion that it would be useless."

"Look here, Sir George, I suppose you'll admit that I am in a perfectly sound state of mind, and in that case what I should like to ask you is, how can that possibly be?"

"Why, my dear fellow, you must remember you are not the only lady-killer in the land."

"Wait a moment, you have not heard me out. You seem to forget what I told you. Lady Fabyn herself gave me reason to understand that my proffer of marriage would be favourably received, and therefore I conclude that your daughter is *not* indifferent to me, as you would have me suppose."

Sir George was puzzled. He felt that unwittingly he had permitted himself to be driven into a corner. It would never do for

him to admit that his wife was at variance with him on the subject. Neither could he explain how matters stood. There was only one course open to him, and he was not slow to adopt it.

"What Lady Fabyn may have said and what *I* say now are two widely different things. I do not think my daughter loves you. I tell you so frankly, and although, as I have said, it is repugnant to me to refuse you an interview, I do so from a good motive."

"Then, I understand my attentions must cease."

"Precisely, for the time being."

"What does that mean, Sir George?"

"Simply that you will always be welcome under this roof provided that, as a man of honour, and in consideration of my wishes, you refrain from any mention of love to my daughter until such time as I may deem fitting. I tell you, Ledsham, it would give me greater pleasure to countenance an alliance with a beggar who had won her

heart than consent to a *mariage de convenance* with the first gentleman in the land."

Sir George rose from his seat as he spoke, and Ledsham, fearing that he should not be able to control his temper if he prolonged the interview, took the hint, and clambered into his dog-cart in a decidedly unenviable state of mind. His own thoughts held sway during the return journey. That Lilian was the subject of them may be guessed, and that they were gloomy in the extreme may be gathered from the gist of the conversation which had taken place between himself and Sir George. That Lord Goddington was not a man to say a thing without meaning it, he knew to his cost, and already he had begun to picture an increased host of creditors, whose ranks were swelled simply because he would no longer have it in his power to keep them quiet, as he had hitherto done, by small payments on account. Already certain projects, requiring ready cash, upon which he had allowed his mind to dwell lovingly, seemed to melt into thin air before the odds pitted

against them, namely, a banking account reduced by one half. Oh, yes; his lordship was quite capable of putting his threat into execution. He was sure of that, and so, by the time he drew up before the stone portico at Breakwood, he had worked himself up into what he would have described as "a devil of a temper," and in this mood he sought his own especial den, where he was wont to beguile the hours by applying himself assiduously to the consumption of cigars and various soothing decoctions calculated to assuage thirst and enable him to kill time.

"Jim, darling, come here, I want to consult you."

"Can't; am in no end of a hurry," answered the dear Jim, as he endeavoured to pass his lady mother, who was standing in the open doorway of her boudoir, having heard the sound of her son's footsteps on the staircase.

"But you *must* come," replied her ladyship resolutely. Jim was not proof against so forcible an appeal when backed up by the reflection that it would be advisable to be

well in with his mother, in case the worst came to the worst, and the "gov'nor" cut up rough, so he reluctantly followed her into the room. Lady Goddington, having gained her point, proceeded to turn over a heap of papers which were lying in a hopeless state of confusion upon her writing-table.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, after a silence of some moments had elapsed, and he had disturbed the slumbers of a French poodle, which lay curled up on a skin, by a gentle reminder, administered with the toe of his varnished boot, that sleep might not be conducive to its health, but if essential, must be sought in an out-of-the-way place.

"Don't kick my dog," screamed her ladyship, upon whom the action was not lost.

"Then don't keep a fellow when he's in a hurry," he retorted.

"You're like a bear with a sore head. What is the matter with you, Jim?"

"Matter enough!"

"Explain yourself."

"Oh, don't worry a fellow; you'll know in

due course. Have you found that blessed paper you seem to be hunting for?"

"Is it money?" asked her ladyship, paying no attention to his question; "because I may be able to help you."

The remark acted like a charm. A sunny smile spread over the countenance of the Honourable Jim, and as he reflected that what he *always* wanted was tendered to him, for the moment he consented to make himself agreeable.

"Thanks, mother; if I do I'll come to you. But tell me, in what way am I likely to be able to——"

"Ah! here it is at last. You see, I cut it out of the *County Gazette*, and that is how I mislaid it."

"What is it?"

"An advertisement for a maid, dear. You see, Horton is leaving me."

"Well?"

"And I thought I would consult you."

"*Me!*"

"Yes, love. From the wording of this I

should judge that she is everything I could desire."

"Very likely, but"—and as he spoke Jim could not resist the sense of the ridiculous which stole over him—"if I may suggest, why, I should say, get something pretty, mother, get something pretty."

"You incorrigible booby!"

"Not such a big one as you take me for. Ha, ha, ha!" and amidst a peal of laughter the Honourable Jim made his escape, and left her ladyship to indite an epistle which was to bear fruit in the future.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE HAS PASSED FOR EVER FROM HIS LIFE.

"Seems like old times again, Mr. Gerard," Wilson remarked, as he bustled about the breakfast-room, anticipating his master's wants, and gazing upon him with an expression on his honest countenance of combined admiration, affection, and respect, as he hovered about his chair.

"You mean that the weather has changed for the better, I suppose," answered Gerard, as his sipped his coffee and absently scanned the pages of the *Times*. "Well, so it has, but then surely at this season one may safely expect to get a glimpse of sunshine."

He knew very well what the man meant, but he did not choose to see it.

"Not a bit of it, sir; I wasn't thinkin' of no

such thing. Weather don't trouble me, wet or dry, hail or shine."

"Oh; then Susan has listened to your wooing and you want my consent," answered Gerard, plunging on in a bantering tone, regardless of the sense of his remarks.

"Worse and worse, sir. No Susans for me, if it's pleasin' to you. I am just content to live on in single blessedness, as the story-books say."

"Are you? That surprises me. Then you are not as ready to make a fool of yourself as most men."

"It's too bad of you, Mr. Gerard, to be makin' game of me; you know right off what I mean. I feel as though ten years had been added on to my life. 'Stead of not knowin' how to make the day pass and goin' to bed and gettin' up again without carin' one way or the other, I'm just as cheerful as the larks singin' up in the sky there. And it's all along of your havin' come back to liven up the old house. Bless you, sir; you've got the master's face and you're as like him as two peas is to each other."

"Am I? Well, whether or no, I am grateful for the kindly feeling you have for me. But there, go and see that the two or three things I told you about are attended to; and remember, when you have seriously made up your mind who is the only woman in the world capable of making you happy, come to me, and you shall have a snug house to live in, and my best wishes for your welfare."

"Thank you, Mr. Gerard; thank you, sir. But I'm best as I am. I like the old place too well to leave it. Why, there's the fences I taught you to jump over, and the cucumber frames you smashed; and oh! I can't tell, sir, but there's just everything to me here in these four walls. No, sir; no fear of my marryin', though I've saved a good bit," he added to himself as he left the room and went about his errands.

"The woman in all the world to make him happy. How little he dreams that I have lost the only one I ever learned to love!" muttered Gerard, as he rose from the table and passed

through the open window on to the terrace. How little he knew as he did so that he stood on the very stones which had re-echoed to Lilian Fabyn's faltering feet, on the night when she had told of his death, and gone forth down that very flight of marble steps, bearing in silence her bitter load of anguish for love of him! It would have been well had he known it. Of late, Gerard had begun to derive a soothing influence from his close friendship with Lilian Fabyn. They had so many sentiments in common; they agreed so thoroughly on various weighty subjects, and, as is often the case when two extremes meet, they were mutually happy in each other's society—she, owing to the love she bore him; he, because he experienced that without which love can never be perfect—*friendship*. Gerard lit a cigar and stood leaning over the stone balustrade which looked down upon the gardens, and he seemed to be gazing upon the broad rolling Devon uplands which lay before him with interest in his deep blue eyes. It would not have been wonderful had he lost himself

in admiration of so fair a scene; but his thoughts were elsewhere.

"This all mine—all mine!" he muttered, "and yet I am alone, and God knows how wretched, whenever I permit myself to think of her. What a farce of me to speak so! *Permit myself*—I am powerless as though I were for the remainder of my days chained to a visionary thing of the past. Would that I *could* forget, but I *cannot*. With the shadows of night her form confronts me, and when I lie down I can see her face, plainly as though she were with me; so near that I could kiss those lips again as I did that night on the deck of the old 'Montezuma,' when she told me she loved me. *Loved me!* What a mockery of the passion that would make me give my soul that hers might live in bliss beyond this world—my life, that I might prove how little I valued it if lived without her! And yet she never cared for me, never cared for aught but gold. Pshaw! I must and will banish her from my mind. But—" and as he spoke the words, Gerard Claren-

court felt the hot tears cloud his vision—"how happy we *might* have been!"

Ten minutes afterwards he was striding in the direction of the low dip in the land which hid the river from view, and the two or three rough country folks, who touched their hats as he passed, and envied him his wealth and good looks, said to themselves, "Surely he is free from all care, if ever mortal was." Under the larches he went, following the windings of the narrow path which led by the side of the stream, and his face wore the silken mask of smiles which those who suffer assume that the world may not discover and mock at their weakness.

"So you have come. How long have I kept you waiting?"

"Of course I have. Did I ever fail to keep an appointment?" answered Gerard, suddenly roused from a reverie into which he had fallen by the sound of Lilian's voice.

He had stretched himself at full length on some turf by the edge of the water, in a hollow formed by the winter floods, where,

half hidden by thick hazel bushes, with the babble of the stream sounding in his ears, and wholly occupied with his own thoughts, he had lain unconscious of her approach.

"No; you are very good to me," she answered, as she picked her way over the rough, weed-covered stones.

"Good to you! Please do not make use of so horribly prosaic an expression. Say, rather, happy with you, and you will be nearer the mark."

"Happy with *me*." What a wealth of soft tenderness did those heedless words bring into the liquid depths of Lilian's eyes, and how she kept repeating them as Gerard busied himself in adjusting her easel and camp-stool, utterly unconscious of the hopes he had strengthened, of the feelings he had nourished! Never while life lasted did she forget that brief sentence, which meant so much to her as she chose to construe its meaning. How blind people are at times! Had he but raised his eyes he

would have seen the warm, rich blood mantle to her cheeks, and would have noticed how her bosom rose and fell beneath its plain cloth covering. Whilst she, unable to control herself, dreaded lest he should look up and learn her secret, unasked, unsought for. But he had taken from his pocket a briar-root pipe, and annoyed by discovering that the stem was choked up, was intent upon rendering it fit to smoke with the aid of a rush he had gathered.

"This was the place you meant, was it not?" he asked at length, having finished the cleaning process to his satisfaction.

"Yes. Don't you think it will make a pretty sketch? Those rocky boulders for a foreground, then the curve in the river, the tiny waterfalls, and just that peep of blue sky through the trees yonder."

"Yes; I think it charming."

"Do you?"

"Yes; but I am going to ask you one favour. Will you grant it?"

"Ah! I will make no rash promises," she answered playfully.

"Well, I will risk a refusal. Give it to me when it is finished, and I will have it hung up in a place of honour at home."

"I promise. But you cannot care for my daubs."

"I have seen none as yet. Had you studied abroad you would have been able to paint a better picture than many of the bigwigs up in town, at least to my taste."

Poor Lilian. She was not proof against flattery from him, besides, if he liked her attempts, she wanted nothing better, and would have been content to ply brush and paint for the remainder of her days, could she but have had him to criticize and praise her work.

"Why, how well you are looking! The colour in your cheeks reminds me of those days when we used to buy sweetmeats together, and spend whole mornings building sand castles, collecting shells, and

chasing the shrimps in the pools on the beach.

"Am I? So father was saying only this morning at breakfast," answered Lilian, as she paused in her work to squeeze a fresh supply of yellow ochre on to her palette. It was true enough; the kind-hearted baronet had watched with a growing sense of delight the change which was daily becoming more manifest in his daughter's appearance. He had even gone so far as to discuss the subject, and chuckle over the success of his plans, with his wife, in the privacy of the marital chamber.

"Hadn't he hit the right nail on the head, and was not Clarencourt the very man of all others to marry Lilian, since she loved him and the sentiment was reciprocated? Then his position in the county was undeniable. What a fool he" (Sir George) "had been to listen for a moment to Ledsham's vapid protestations of love. A fellow who could take himself off for weeks at a time if there was anything to be done

in town, and who, horror of horrors, did not know one horse from another" (so Sir George asserted), "and who certainly could not ride a yard."

To which string of accusations her ladyship had replied, "That it did not matter one iota whether he was a judge of a horse or no. And if he could not ride, well, he could get on without it. In short, a man with a title and estates, such as those to which the Honourable Jim was heir, could afford to do without anything, and be nothing." Her ladyship had delivered herself very forciby upon that point, and had denounced her husband's conduct in the harshest terms.

"Yes, those were happy days," soliloquized Gerard, as he lay full length on his back, with his hands clasped behind his head and his hat tilted over his eyes.

"Which?"

"Why, when we were both young enough to trouble ourselves about no graver ills than a wet day, or a scolding for a soiled pinafore,

and yearned for nothing better than some gaudy toy."

"Happier than these?" she ventured to ask between the strokes of her brush, and whilst holding her head on one side as though criticizing the effect of her efforts, but in reality to prevent him from reading any tell-tale expression which might come unbidden.

"Ay! a thousand times."

"And why?" Her face was as white as her canvas now, but he did not observe it and rattled on.

"Because, then, the moments were full of gladness and teeming with hopes unrealized, yet believed in. Then we looked, and longed for the morrow, when the sun would come again, and we should be at play, hand in hand, for our spirits had known no shadows. Then, life stretched out before us as a golden plain filled with pleasures, and our natures were buoyant because they had not been damped by contact with those who had become soured and heartless because years had taught them what life is. Happier then? Ah! *ma belle*,

I should think so," continued Gerard, suddenly rounding off his sentence in the best way he could, because of the scared look in her face—" you have dropped your brush."

" Thanks."

" Oh, you must not heed my wild words. Sometimes I rave for want of something better to do, and then there is no stopping me."

" But—but you could not talk so unless you had suffered too," she faltered.

" I! how droll! Why, of all the men you know none are merrier, none more ready to do anything, go anywhere, or laugh louder than myself. Is it not so?"

" Yes, but does the loud laugh hide an—an——"

" An aching heart, you would say. In my case how should it? You know my life."

No; there he was wrong. There were those months abroad of which she knew nothing; and she had never forgotten the allusions made by Wilson, or the name of the woman he had mentioned. She remembered it yet, and repeated it to herself, *Mrs.*

Devereaux. She was too timid; and besides she had no right to inquire into his past. He had come back to her, and she had told herself that she could afford to let that mystery remain unsolved, at least, for the present.

"No, no! I am one of the fortunate ones, you know," he continued. "Born with a silver spoon in my mouth, to use the hackneyed expression adopted by people sometimes, perhaps for ridicule, but more often, I should say, from envy, because they happen to have been less fortunate. Consequently, I am popularly supposed to live in a sphere above the reach of sorrow, that is, of the ordinary kind. So are you. The good people in this place, who know something of our circumstances, would laugh in derision at the bare idea of our knowing what the word trouble means. Grief is swept away by the possession of money, and nothing remains of all the ills which attack mankind, for which we need hope for sympathy, save death. They live on poor fare, a scant allowance of bread and, for aught I know, but little meat. They were

bred and born to it, yet they envy us our truffles and our gold, forgetting that we are as used to *pâté de foie gras* as they are to porridge, and that our thousands are no more to us than their pence to them. We are accustomed to them from the day we remember first, consequently we derive no greater pleasures from the possession of such luxuries than they do from their humbler comforts."

Lilian had paused in her work, and was regarding him with wonder. She had never seen Gerard so much excited. He had risen from his recumbent position, and was pacing up and down the narrow limits of ground which was shut in, on the one side by the water, and on the other by the high banks. In reality, Gerard had spoken as he did with a view to throw her off the scent. He did not wish her or any one to know that he had endured aught that he had spoken of, but he had determined to unburden his heart in a measure, without discovering his own identity.

"Go on with your painting," he continued, as he stooped for a handful of

pebbles, and flung them into the circles made by a greedy trout as it rose to the surface to devour its winged prey. "Go on with your painting, and I will tell you a story I once heard, of a man who was fool enough to love, not wisely, but too well. He was young, too young to cope with the evil temper and want of love he experienced from his relatives, who, at a time when it suited them, were the means of hastening his departure from home, and inducing him to go abroad. He remained long away, and visited distant lands. So-called friends sprang up—and it was willed that one of them should be the means of introducing him to a woman who, from the very commencement of their intimacy, exercised an influence over him, at once deep and lasting. His passion increased with the days, until at length, he summoned courage to declare his love."

"And was he accepted?" asked Lilian breathlessly, she knew not why.

"Wait a moment, and you shall hear all that was told to me. Yes, she made him, as

he then thought, supremely happy, by owning that she cared for him in return. I am forced to skip over a brief space, because my memory is at fault, but anyhow, she accepted him, and they were——"

"Married, I suppose," interrupted Lilian.

"Yes, married. And now comes the singular part of my story, for which you will be ill-prepared, since I know I was."

"*You!*" she exclaimed with a start, as though already she had divined that he was alluding to himself.

"Yes. You see it is some time ago, and I had a blind belief and confidence in the world in general, so naturally I was surprised. They were married in the orthodox way, but from what I was led to understand, they separated shortly, each to go on a separate path in life. She believed him to be wealthy, and had married him for that reason. He, fondly trusting in her love, and having never led her to suppose that he was rich, explained to her his position. It was enough; she appeared in her true colours. She was his dupe.

As if she would have sacrificed herself had she known. He had played her false. He was dishonourable; everything that was vile. His pride could not brook the insults heaped upon him, and he left her *for ever. For ever*," Gerard repeated; "would *you* have done the same under the circumstances or no?"

For a few seconds Lilian remained silent. Women are naturally suspicious, and though in a shapeless form, of which she was almost unconscious, the thought did enter her mind that before her stood the principal actor in the drama he had related. There was nothing that could strengthen her doubts, as she glanced quickly up at him. How she loved him, and trembled when his hand rested upon her arm! Ah, no! *that* could not be. How could she do aught but believe in him!

And Gerard, all unconscious of the storm of conflicting thoughts he had called into being, bent over her, and asked this question:

"Well; and was she worthy of his love?"

For an instant there was a dead silence between them, broken only by the twitter of

the birds in bush and brake, or the rattle of a stone as it crumbled away from the bank to fall with a dull splash into the pool below. Above, on the summit of the bank, the close-growing nut bushes swayed as though moved by some invisible hand, and then parted on either side to disclose the proud, patrician features of a woman's face. Clearly the answer rang out in the still morning air as Lilian raised her eyes from her work to look full at Gerard.

"*Worthy!* how can you ask it? Though I suppose there are many as infamous and heartless, *women of the world*, I suppose you call them. Of course, she was not worthy."

"I think with you," he answered slowly.

"And *he*, I mean the husband, has he ceased to remember her?"

The white jewelled hand trembled as it held back the brown stem of the hazel, and the face of the listener drew nearer, until she stood on the very edge of the crumbling earth which supported her.

"She has passed for ever from his life," he answered in clear, low tones.

The bushes sprang back into their place, and the birds carolled forth their songs from the topmost boughs, no longer disturbed by the presence of the woman who had scared them from their haunts. She had fled with a look of bitter pain, of hopeless anguish on her face, from which all the pride had melted. Ah! how she suffered! Yet, none knew of it save God. And the sun shone forth just as brightly, and tinged her golden tresses as she sped, fearful of being seen, at the top of her speed back to where the home that held her boy, *his* child, nestled amongst the trees.

"Too true, too true! Gerard; I was not worthy of you," she moaned as her lips murmured his name.

CHAPTER V.

WELL, SHE HAD A HEART.

A COUPLE of hours afterwards Gerard was sauntering aimlessly along the Esplanade, which was broad and well kept, and considering the size and population of Sidcombe, had cost the good people of the place more than need have been spent upon it. But then great things were expected by the younger and more aspiring of the community, and although wise heads had been shaken when the projected improvements were broached, and some of them had declared that what had been good enough for their forefathers was good enough for them, all objections had been overruled, the money accordingly voted, and spent. And so the wiseacres had a good opportunity offered them to chuckle, and remind the unfortunate

promoters of the scheme that they told them how it would be. It was all very well to advertize and to have a whole page in the county guide devoted to an explanation, couched in the usual hackneyed parlance, of the pleasures to be enjoyed by a visit to the place, but who was to pay for it if no one came?—and no one had come more than in the good old times, until suddenly, as has been described, Sidcombe was roused from its lethargy. But even after that the fossils still adhered to their bone of contention, and retired under cover of their prognostications, and muttered affirmations that "there was time enough yet," and "only wait a bit and see if they were not right."

"Whatever shall I do with myself?" Gerard asked of himself as he glanced seawards. "A few months of this humdrum existence is too terrible to contemplate. Go abroad again, I suppose, and by dint of excitement strive to forget. That seems all that is open to me now. Those drivelling idiots, the lawyers, too, are enough to drive me wild.

Long letters, any amount of them of course, but containing no news, nothing that can throw a light upon her movements. What has become of her? Where has she gone? Scotland Yard could help me, yet I have no right, or I am too proud, to seek her by such means. Where would be the good of it? And yet to learn that she lives and is well is what I would give ten years of my life to discover."

"A fine, seasonable day, sir," exclaimed a voice near him.

Gerard turned his head and recognized in the speaker the veteran coastguardsman of the station.

"You're quite a stranger hereabout, sir, now," continued the man, as he raised his face—red and shrivelled as a winter apple—to Gerard's.

"Yes. I have been abroad," answered Gerard absently. He was in no mood to converse with any one at that moment, and the sight of the old man, and all that seeing him recalled, did not serve to divert his mind even for an instant. When they had last met

some few days before he had sailed for Calcutta, it had been in the fury of a blinding storm. The roar of the wind and the sad, low boom of a distant gun had roused Gerard from his bed, and he had sought the beach, where the crew of the life-boat were gathered. Only a few weeks before, in attempting to rescue a shipwrecked crew, the boat had been overturned and the old man alone had escaped by a miracle, to tell the tale. The new hands were reluctant to venture forth on the black mountains of water. No boat could live, they argued, and to make the attempt would be to court certain death. And then it was that Gerard, listening midst the crowd of anxious watchers, had sprung forward and dared them to follow him. Could they refuse? It was impossible; they would be branded as cowards, so they had gone, and returned safe and sound, their errand of mercy accomplished, and eleven lives saved from the terrors of a watery grave.

"Been away in furrin' parts, sir, so I heer'd

tell. It's long since my old eyes have looked on the stem of a palm, or the white of a nigger's eye, but I've doubled the Horn a time or two. Askin' your pardon, sir; but I takes the liberty, since I've known ye when you was no higher than a poop bucket. You know my old shanty, yonder by the boat-house, when there's nothin' pressin' doin', come and yarn. Bless you, sir, it will bring back my own young days."

"I will; never fear. Glad to see you looking so hale and hearty. Good-morning."

"Somethin' wrong; somethin' amiss, I'd bet my last pipe o' baccy," muttered the old sailor as he strolled away with his hard, brown hands plunged deep into the pockets of his blue pilot-cloth jacket. "He's not the same lad; and it's the world (I means the women) as has done it."

And he was not far wrong.

Gerard passed on, and only turned in his walk when his feet grated on the great ridge of pebbles under which the river oozed its course to the sea. Scarce knowing what he

did, he at length entered a building whose front was decorated by a green balcony, overhung by a striped cotton awning, under which some men were lounging, smoking cigarettes, discussing politics, and occasionally varying the monotony by staring, through the medium of a huge brass telescope, at the sails of some merchantman which hove in sight. Sidcombe folks knew the place as the Club, it is almost unnecessary to add, and it boasted of a select though limited number of members, most of whom were possessed of money or birth as a passport to its sacred precincts. No sooner had Gerard entered the billiard-room than he was greeted by familiar voices.

"Why, Clarencourt; is that you? First time we've met for ages. Glad to see you amongst us again safe and sound. Come and play me at billiards."

"No; I'll be shot if you do. Let us get up a pool," called out the Honourable Jim noisily, from where he was lolling full length on a velvet settee.

"Never mind those fellows; come and talk to me," exclaimed another man who was heir to a baronetcy, old as the hills, but unfortunately mortgaged up to the last acre. "But first let me do the honours," he continued; "Colonel Steele—Mr. Clarencourt—Mr.—Oh, the devil; why, you've met before."

"We have, if I mistake not, colonel. In Calcutta, I think; though, perhaps, you will scarcely remember me," said Gerard as he held out his hand.

"No, 'pon my soul I don't happen to do so. Meet so many men, you know," answered Steele, as he drew back a pace. A lie more or less to him was a trifle, and though he knew Gerard by sight as well as any man in the room, he preferred to pretend that, so far as he recollected, they had never met. It gave him breathing time. As a rule, Gerard was prone to take offence, but though he felt instinctively that Steele had not spoken the truth, he did not chose to resent the affront offered to him, though at a loss to account for the reason of it.

"I was introduced to you in the Eden Gardens, Calcutta, by an old friend of mine, Geoffrey Carelesse," he answered quietly, with his eyes fixed on Steele's face.

"Carelesse; why, of course. I recollect you distinctly now you speak of him. Delighted to have the pleasure of again shaking hands with you." Then, as he addressed himself to the others: "Well; what is it to be? Pool or pyramids? Give it a name, anything to kill time until dinner."

"Not thinking of going abroad again, Clarencourt?" asked Ledsham, as he selected his cue. The question was one of moment to him, and was put with a view to drawing Gerard as to his future movements.

"Not at present; my plans are very uncertain," answered Gerard coldly, for although Ledsham spoke with a smile on his face, Gerard had never been able to divest himself of a feeling of repugnance for the future Lord Goddington. He had once told some one in confidence that try as you would, you could never induce Ledsham to look you

straight in the face, and in his estimation that failing was an unpardonable one, so far as his friendship was concerned. And at that moment, though apparently so well disposed, Ledsham would rather that Gerard had been at the bottom of the sea, sewn up in six feet of good stout canvas, and with a small weight, in the shape of a thirty-six pound shot, securely attached to his heels, than where he was, at large in Sidcombe.

"I am afraid I shall have to disappoint you fellows, and make myself disagreeable by not playing," interposed Gerard, who felt that anything was preferable to forcing himself to join a game in which in his present mood he was far from feeling an interest.

"Oh, hang it! Clarencourt, the whole thing will fall through without you. Don't leave us in the lurch," said some one.

"Thanks; you must really excuse me. I have not handled a cue for months."

"All the more reason why you should play now, to get your hand in."

"Well then, you and Burke knock the balls

about, Ledsham. I think I must be off too, time's up."

"What! You going to desert us, Steele? Well! you are something that's perhaps better left unsaid," remonstrated Ledsham.

"Never mind. Tell me when you see me next," replied Steele as he edged towards the door. He wanted to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with Gerard, so judged that his best course was to beat a judicious retreat.

"With your permission, colonel, I will accompany you for a short distance," remarked Gerard, who wished to learn some news of Geoffrey Carelesse.

The colonel expressed his willingness in chosen terms, stifled a curse under his moustaches, at what he called "the infernal impudence of the fellow," and the two men left the club together.

"I want to ask you about Carelesse," said Gerard, by way of a commencement. "I have neither heard of or from him since we shook hands just before your regiment left Calcutta. We were at school together, and

one does not like to lose sight of old friends."

"No; the new ones are but a poor substitute for the old," replied Steele evasively, all the while pondering what he should say by way of answering the questions put to him, for his own guilty conscience forbade him to speak the truth.

"You are right; they are. Anyhow, I will delay no longer, and the next mail shall bear a letter to Geoffrey, for I cannot forget the friendship that existed between us, the thread of which time and distance alone has been the means of snapping. I am conscious that the blame rests with me, for I am aware of my faults as a correspondent; however, it is never too late to make amends for my negligence. I am ignorant of his whereabouts, and if you will furnish me with his address I shall be greatly obliged."

"That I am unable to do."

"You surprise me, colonel. How is that?"

"Simply because he left the regiment be-

fore I sailed from India; some months before, indeed."

"Ah! yes, exchanged perhaps," remarked Gerard, blurting out the first idea that occurred to him.

"Not a bit of it, he was cashiered," replied Steele bluntly, his dislike to Carelesse rising to the surface.

"Cashiered! Good heavens! You don't mean that. You must be joking," answered Gerard.

"Never more in earnest in my life," was Steele's unfeeling answer, and the corners of his mouth curled with a sardonic smile as he spoke, for it gave him pleasure to speak of his enemy's humiliation, and so evident was his satisfaction that Gerard remarked it to himself.

"And what was the cause of it?"

"My dear fellow, you appear to give me credit for being a species of walking epitome, filled with the sayings and doings of the young officers whom it was my misfortune to have attached to my corps. Permit me

to disabuse your mind of any such fallacy. Since you ask it, I should be only too glad to afford you information of Mr. Carelesse, were it in my power; but, I repeat, it is not. And if I might be permitted to suggest it, I should say that what I have already told you, should be sufficient to make you pause before seeking to know more of him. Men are not ignominiously dismissed from Her Majesty's service unless a grave offence, unworthy of officers and gentlemen, has been committed, and proved by court-martial." Steele drew himself up as he spoke, as though he were the very soul of honour, who had never erred nor been caught backsliding. Caught! ah, that was the word on which hung all the law and the prophets; no matter what his sins, he had never been brought to book. He knew, but no one else did; and the blameless front he had presented to the world (or rather, the cunning with which he had concealed his faults) had enabled him to don the uniform of a colonel, with numerous decorations. Take it to

heart, *mes frères*, take it to heart, and remember, that the world shrugs its shoulders with contempt when a fool stumbles, because of some blunder that a child would have known better than commit, yet it cannot but admire the ingenuity and subtlety of a rogue, though thankful when justice robs such miscreants of the power to do harm. Whilst Steele was speaking, the conversation he had had with Geoffrey Carelesse in his quarters at Calcutta, on the morning when he had purposely driven past Ada Devereaux's bungalow, on his way to Fort William, recurred to Gerard's mind. He could recall all that had passed, and certainly, if he might judge from Steele's manner, there was no love lost between them, as Geoffrey had said. But he was roused from his reverie by hearing himself again addressed.

"Sorry if what I have told you has proved unpleasant. To me, it was so, I can assure you. But here we must part, my road lies in that direction. Good-bye. We shall meet again soon, I trust."

Gerard bowed coldly. There was no necessity to speak. A few short months ago, before he had known sorrow, and when his temper was often hot and unreasonable, he would have denounced Steele to his face, as the cause of his friend's misfortune, simply upon the ground of his suspicion, coupled with the dislike which had sprung up in his impulsive heart even during their brief conversation. Now, he contented himself by turning on his heel with a haughty bend of his head, and without attempting to grasp the hand which Steele extended. He was due at a dinner at the Fabyns. There was not too much time to permit of his returning to Clifford's Wood to dress, but as he strolled homewards he pondered on the subject, and mentally determined, if it were ever in his power, to make inquiries on behalf of his old school chum. That opportunity never came.

"The young cockerel, damn him!" muttered Steele. "Refused my hand, and walked off with the air of an emperor. I'd half a mind

to follow him and thrash him within an inch of his life, only it would soil my fingers." The noble colonel had it all his own way since theory was the order of the day rather than practice. "I shall put a spoke in his wheel yet though, it strikes me, for I don't think my memory is a bad one, and it is not my creed to forget or forgive an insult. Yes, the time will come, and this fellow shall go the way of the other one. I can rid myself of all who fall foul of me as easily as I kick this stone from my path," he added savagely, and by way of emphasis he sent, with the aid of his stout shooting-boot, a rough-edged splinter of granite skimming into the river. "And now, for *la belle Devereaux*, since he is far enough away. It would never do to let him get wind of her, for I'd bet fifty pounds to a Burmah cheroot that he never escaped her. Why, deuce take him, he had the run of the bungalow, and such licence was sure to prove fatal to a romantic youth, with a character at once stupid and confiding, if I'm a judge of those

quiet, dreamy eyes of his. Thinks every woman he meets a saint, and treats them accordingly. The fool!"

Musing thus kindly, Colonel Steele walked off in exactly the opposite direction, which led by the path up the river to Ada Devereaux's home. Poor Ada! how much hope had fled; how much sorrow had come and taken up its abode in her life since the morning sun had gilded the topmost boughs of the larches! And yet it was only now sinking westwards behind the blue sea. With a look of hopeless dejection on her face, which peered forth, tear-stained and sorrowful, midst the wealth of her golden hair, lay the once proud and haughty Ada Devereaux, of whom men had said when they had asked her heart in exchange for their own, "She cannot love, she has no soul above a lust for gold. She has no feeling—lovely as a dream in softly tinted porcelain, but as hollow." We like to judge our neighbours, but how signally the wisest of us fail! How absurdly vain we are of our own powers of discrimina-

tion! How ready to use them to the injury of others! And yet to the end of our days we are but children. We blow soap bubbles of imagination and inflate them with belief in ourselves, only to see them burst one by one, until, bereft of all our delusions we await the leniency which lies beyond, but which we have never shown to others. Well, she had a heart, they could not have doubted now, had they seen her moaning incoherently to herself of the love she believed she had lost for ever. Prostrate, where she had sunk in the first outburst of her anguish, on a tiger skin, which half covered her tiny drawing-room floor, as though to mockingly remind her that it was one of the few things that remained, of all that had once been hers. A step grated on the path, she heard the wooden gate which admitted to the garden, creak on its hinges. Some one was coming. In an instant she had sprung to her feet like a frightened fawn. None might look upon her dishevelled locks and white, wan cheeks, wet with the

tears she could not restrain? She was a woman again.

"Admit no one, I am not at home," was the order she gave, and then from behind the lace curtain, which hid her from his sight, she watched Steele depart, cursing his luck as he went, and in his suspicious heart blaming Clarencourt for his disappointment. The shadows deepened as the sunlight vanished, and the birds twittered in the ivy until they, too, were at rest, and naught was left of sound save the sighing of the wind and the ceaseless murmur of the stream. And Ada bore her grief alone, with none to see, none to pity her, save God.

CHAPTER VI.

GEOFFREY CARELESSE.

With Geoffrey Carelesse life had been one long down-hill run of luck since the tears had stood in his eyes as he had bid farewell to honest Frank Garrick and the old corps, in the gray mist of the early morning. When the tide of fortune sets against a man there seems to be no end to the rush of circumstances which bear him along, helpless as an infant to stem the resistless strength of the course of events. Sadly he returned to Calcutta, buoyed up by a vestige of hope, which led him back to that town as a bright day star in the darkness around—Ada Devereaux. There, through the friends and acquaintances she had known, he would gain news of her; doubtless she had written to some of them, for it was only fair

to suppose that, courted and flattered as she had been, her movements could not remain a mystery. Disappointment met him in the teeth, and despite the most minute inquiries, none could tell him of her. Rumour informed him that she had left Calcutta for England, in company with Gerard Clarencourt, for beyond a doubt they sailed in the same boat. A pretty piece of news to be forced to content himself with, but it was all he could obtain. Burning with jealousy and misgivings, he had engaged a passage on board the first steamer leaving the port for London. Bad news flies fast, and more awaited him, for on presenting himself at his uncle's house in Belgravia, he was informed that he was unconscious, and the doctors told him that he would not live through the day. Their opinion was correct, and without being able to whisper one farewell word, into the ear of the man who alone amongst his relations had ever stretched out a helping hand to him, Geoffrey Carelesse had to stand by and watch the laboured breathing of

the sufferer until it ceased. Yet his misfortunes had not ended. His uncle had announced without scruple that Geoffrey would be his heir. The morning came when the will was read, and cold and dispiriting the contents of the musty document proved to be, for with his gold *pince-nez* trembling on the tip of his long, pointed nose, the old family solicitor announced that the bulk of the property had been left unconditionally to a distant connection. Geoffrey had stood by and tried to look unconcerned when treated to an insolent stare by the fortunate individual in question, and pitying looks from those who expected to get nothing, or whose turn had not yet come. Sympathy was the hardest thing to bear, harder perhaps than the blow dealt to him when the sing-song, whining voice came to the words, "And to my well-beloved nephew Geoffrey Carelesse, I will and bequeath the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum; furthermore the sum of five hundred pounds, to enable him to liquidate any extravagances he may

have incurred, &c., &c." So perished his dreams of wealth, but worst of all, so seemed to fade away the hopes he had cherished of one day making Ada Devereaux his wife. He had told himself that he would forgive her seeming neglect of him, in never having written, as he had begged she would, the moment she arrived in England; ay, forgive and forget everything, and force her to love him spite of all. Dark clouds gathered on his brow when fancy pictured Gerard Clarencourt as a favoured suitor, perhaps married to her, and then his oath recurred to him, "No man shall rob me of you and live," words uttered on the spur of the moment, in the torrent of love and passion which had come upon him. And now, as the dream of his life stood before him in the quiet of his dingy London lodgings, or whilst hurrying through the crowded streets, unknown, uncared for; for the poor and unfortunate make no new friends, even yet, as that beauty which he worshipped, that face he loved so well, came near to him, he dreaded to think

how far he might be tempted to keep to the tenor of that dark sentence, "No man shall rob me of you and live."

"We shall see, we shall see," he muttered. "I never despair, and the time when we shall meet again is yet to come."

CHAPTER VII.

EAVESDROPPING.

"You do not understand me," remarked Lord Goddington testily to his wife, as they conversed together in the morning-room at Breakwood. "You have never been able to fathom my intentions, and have signally failed to read between the lines. Do you suppose that I do not know?"

"I do not suppose anything. There is no necessity, and as for reading between the lines, why the idea is amusing in itself, your motives are so patent to every one. You know you have committed a blunder in silencing my objections to that minx of a Fabyn girl, and although you have made poor dear Jim the laughing-stock of the whole county, man-like you will not admit that you have made a mistake."

"I repeat I have made none, and James has to thank himself. He had the goodwill of Sir George and her ladyship, everything at his feet, and if any one is to blame in the matter, it is himself."

"I don't agree with you. She is not his equal, and rather than have the Goddington escutcheon tarnished, I am thankful that events have taken the turn they have."

"*Equal!* Stuff and nonsense. If your diamonds are not paid for, or a mortgage has to be cleared off, I should like to know what will do it. Money. Very well, she has it, and we are in need of it. There is an end of the matter."

"Miss Lilian Fabyn might be the only girl in the whole universe, to hear you talk."

"The estates join, and——"

"Well?"

"These quibbles affect my heart. You are aware that I am far from strong, and I must insist upon quarrels of this nature ceasing. Plumpton recommends quietness, and what is more, I will have it." His lordship took his

gold spectacles from off his aristocratic nose, and placed them on the table with a thump, by way of emphasizing his remarks.

"Oh, nonsense; you know I am the last person in the world to wish to put you out," replied her ladyship, whose temper generally melted at mention of his ailments, for in her own way she was fond of her husband. "You know I am unremitting in my attentions to you when you require them."

"Very good of you, very good, I am sure," grumbled his lordship.

"Good? How absurd of you! It is my duty. At the same time, I should like to discuss this matter with you thoroughly. Jim tells me that you have threatened to reduce his allowance."

"Well?"

"Is that true?"

"Quite."

"And is such a step just or kind?"

"I think so, and that ought to be sufficient."

"I differ from you."

"My dear, I knew what you were going to say before you spoke, but we must agree to differ. There is one alternative which it is in his power to avail himself of. Let him marry the girl."

"What! Lilian Fabyn! after what has passed. Never with my consent."

"Then, though it would be a pity, the ceremony must be gone through without. He must marry her or some one with an equally large fortune. His personal expenditure is far larger than my own. He is the most extravagant fellow I know, considering his years and our financial position."

"Then this is the first I have heard of it," remarked her ladyship. "But I am no nearer the point I aimed at than when I began. I wish to hear your opinions."

"Then, my dear, I will condense them expressly for you, since this subject must be wearisome. I should wish James to persevere, and if he does and follows my advice, Mr. Gerard Clarencourt will be beaten out of the field and lose the lady of his love."

The doors which opened into the room in which this conversation took place were covered with curtains of thick, rich stuff, behind which an eavesdropper could with impunity remain concealed. In the old days, when conspiracies were hatched under one's own roof-tree, and those who should have been nearest and dearest often proved to be the most implacable foes, such luxuries were often wisely discarded.

"Well, you must have your own way, I suppose; you always do," continued her ladyship.

"Now, my love, you really must not permit your feelings to get the better of your sense of justice. We have argued upon that point before, and you have been obliged to admit that I have never acted except in conjunction with you. Is it not so?"

His lordship paused; he could remember the day when that endearing expression, "my love," which he had just seen fit to offer as a species of sop, had worked wonders; but this time he was fated to employ it in vain.

Lady Goddington showed no signs of pleasure as the once welcome syllable fell upon her ear; perhaps she was getting used to it; anyhow she *curled up*, to use an expressive piece of slang.

"As witness your action in this matter, for instance. No; I wish you to understand that I will be no party to this projected Fabyn connection."

"Very well; then I must persevere in my intentions single-handed. I can follow no other course, since I am alive to the wisdom of it."

"How you can humble your pride to such an extent as to overlook the affronts offered to you by the whole set is more than I am able to comprehend," remarked her ladyship, firing her last shot slowly and with precision.

"It is not a question of pride, but of common sense. You seem to forget that pride is an expensive luxury and costs money, my dear."

The curtain drawn over the door which communicated with the rest of the house was

at this point in the discussion visibly agitated, and had Lord Goddington chanced to look in that direction, he would have been suspicious that at least one person more than he bargained for was present; but he was absorbed in matters of more moment, as he would gravely have described them, so the rustle passed unnoticed.

"Now, if I could find a flaw in Mr. Gerard Clarencourt's character; discover some little youthful indiscretion, ha, ha, ha!—you know what I mean, my dear—some trifling peccadillo, insignificant so long as the light of day is not brought to bear upon it, but better left untold to the woman one is about to marry—I should feel quite confident of spoiling his little game, eh?"

"I cannot help you."

"Oh, but you can. A woman's wit——"

"Will not be employed in this instance."

"Ah, you will come round to my way of thinking."

"Never, my lord, never!" replied her ladyship with ludicrous solemnity, rising from her

seat, the noise she made in doing so causing the door before alluded to to open and shut to admit of the exit of a woman who had overheard every sentence of what had passed.

"Never will I be a party, as I have told you, to this marriage. I should be unable to forgive myself were I to do so. All I will say is, weigh your words and actions; and now I shall leave you to ponder over what I have said."

As she spoke, Lady Goddington swept out of the room with a pompous rustle of her skirts, his lordship's courtesy necessitating a rush to the door, which he opened for her. But no sooner was it shut than he returned to his chair, and after administering comfort to himself in the shape of a huge pinch of snuff, he muttered aloud, as a vent to his feelings:

"Some flaw in his character. Ah! but how to find it? There's the rub."

In a side passage which led on to what was known as the grand staircase, a very different scene was being enacted. The

Honourable Jim Ledsham was given to rising late; no matter whether he went to bed early, which he seldom did, or whether the gray of dawn lighted him on his way to his couch, he preferred breakfasting towards mid-day, unless something unusual were on the *tapis*. Now, it so chanced that having finished his toilette to his own complete satisfaction, he was leisurely descending to the lower regions, when all at once, in rounding an angle, he became conscious of having fallen into the arms of—oh, heavens!—a woman, and what was better, a decidedly pretty one, as he was by no means slow to find out.

"And who the devil—I beg pardon—who in the name of all that is wonderful are you?" he exclaimed as he looked at her without recognizing her.

"Miladi's new maid, monsieur."

"Oh! and where were you off to in such a hurry?"

"Nowhere."

"Very likely, though people don't often rush about as though a certain gentleman,

who shall be nameless, were in hot pursuit of them without some reason."

"Milord does not doubt my word."

"Not I; who could, when backed up by eyes such as yours?"

"Oh, milord!"—this accompanied by an ogle and a blush.

"Humbug; I'm not my lord, so don't let the gov'nor hear you say that or it will be a case of my influence being used to prevent you from getting a month's notice to quit, and then good-bye to that sweet little face of yours. Oh! don't be frightened, I'm only joking. What's your name?"

"Julie."

"Julie? deuced pretty too. Well, here is something to buy ribbons with. And all I can say is that mother has carried out my instructions to the letter," he added to himself; "better than I could have done myself, I do believe."

Five minutes afterwards the Honourable Jim was recalling the circumstance of his meeting with Julie, and to judge of the rapidity with

which he disposed of sundry dainty comestibles, it had imparted a piquant relish. Facts are stranger than fiction, and odd though it may appear, the letter dispatched by Lady Goddington, in reply to an advertisement as mentioned, had resulted in due course in the appearance of Julie, bag and baggage, and looking, moreover, quite as pert and capable of using her tongue as freely, if occasion offered, as when she bounced out of the Langham Hotel. Whatever might be her claim to beauty, it was markedly characteristic of her nation, and that is all that need be said upon the subject, though she believed devoutly in knowing, or at all events in trying to know, more about the business of others than she probably did of her own; hence the movement behind the curtain, the opening and closing of the door, which had been followed by her frantic attempt to escape being seen by her mistress, and had ended by her stumbling against Jim Ledsham. Money affected Julie's sense of right and wrong in proportion as the sum was increased or diminished by the

generosity of the donor, and as she turned the coin over in her hand and discovered that it was a sovereign, it dawned upon her mind that if she sharpened her wits she might earn more of them.

CHAPTER VIII.

HER DEATH BLOW.

Gerard loved his home. There was not a hole or corner at Clifford's Wood he did not know—not a tree in the grounds that was not in a measure sacred to him, as forming a connecting link with the sunny hours of his boyhood. Other estates belonged to the family, and in the interest of his mother he had gone over to Ireland at times, but only when business obliged him to do so. Yet life in a rambling old country residence, which, to make it cheery and snug, needed from its very size, a host of friends to disperse the gloom which seemed to hang about its rooms when tenantless, was scarcely the one best calculated to harmonize with the feelings and impulses of a high-spirited, sensitive nature such as Gerard Clarencourt's. Events had shown him

to be capable of a love which, had he lived in the days of chivalry, and always supposing that an affection worthy of his had been offered in exchange, would have amounted to a daring heroism which the noble knights of the Cross themselves would have found no cause to disdain. But, when alone for long, the days hung heavily upon his hands. *He could not bear to think*, and therein lay the secret of it all. He was no antiquary to wander, wrapped in conjectures of what *had* been, midst crumbling, moss-grown ruins, content in dreaming of a former greatness which history's dog-eared page unfolded. No; the splendid line,

"Life is real, life is earnest,"

had in its simple force of language more power to awaken an echo in his heart. Placed as he was, what wonder, then, that half his day (or as much of it as he could contrive) was spent in the society of the only being with whom he had two ideas in common—Lilian Fabyn. He knew and felt that *that*,

too, would end, and he must go away again, when, he knew not, whither, he cared less. All that he had planned was, that when the change came, it should be for one in which the wildest and most reckless excitement could be met with at every turn. And many a time, since no news of Ada Devereaux had come to him, he had silently blamed himself for ever forsaking the rough life of freedom he had led with the good-hearted, devil-may-care fellows, in the wilds of the South African bush, for a home-coming where no home was. Everything was at his beck and call that money could procure and modern ingenuity and knowledge devise. Then, why was he unhappy? Ah, it is so natural to ask the question, so easy to answer it. Because of a love lost; because of a heart given by a nature incapable of forgetting or taking back; because of a weariness of spirit which, at times, came upon him with a force and bitterness that made him, in the loneliness of his own chamber, when the brain would not rest, and sleep refused to touch with soothing

fingers his quivering eyelids, exclaim: "Oh, God! when will it all end? Will rest never come?" Slumber had not come to him until the pale light of dawn was strong enough to enable his weary eyes to trace every turn and angle in the wall-paper, and each particular of the hunting prints hung around the room. Half the night through he had paced his chamber with long, uneven strides, seeing but one face, remembering the familiar tones of but one voice, brought to him by memory which repeated over and over again the soft, low accompaniment, as her fingers seemed to wander deftly over the keys of the piano. Ah! *how* he remembered! how he suffered! little thinking that close at hand, nestling midst the trees, under the shelter of a rose-covered cottage, thinking of him, with *his* child in her arms, lay the woman who bore his name—*his wife!* Yet, when the day had to be faced, the aching heart was hidden, and a smile was given with a jest in answer to Wilson's solemn protestation,

"That if Mr. Gerard didn't take care of himself, he'd be in the doctor's hands."

Gerard had an appointment at The Towers, where he had promised to lunch, and he had resolved at last to tell Lilian of his intention to go abroad again.

"Better delay no longer," he had told himself during his midnight vigil. So whilst he pretended to do justice to the good things spread for him by Wilson—for that honest servant would allow no one else to wait upon his master, and stood patiently behind his chair during the whole of the solitary breakfast—Gerard pondered where he should go, and at that very moment, though he knew it not, he was the subject of an animated conversation, which was being sustained between Sir George Fabyn and his wife.

"Let the matter drop."

"I won't. I will know what you intend to do," said Lady Fabyn.

"Nothing, at present, certainly. Young people must be left to settle such delicate affairs to their own liking," retorted Sir

George, through the half-closed door of his dressing-room, where he was at that moment employed in the delicate process of shaving.

"*Nothing!* The idea! Why, he has not even asked our consent, and has had the impudence to make love to Lilian for all these weeks without having an understanding with us first," replied Lady Fabyn from the next room.

"The probability is he is frightened of you. I know *I* should be, were I in his shoes," remarked the baronet comically, as he paused in his operation to indulge in the smile he could not restrain.

"Don't be impertinent, Sir George. Remember you are the responsible person in this affair."

"All right; saddle everything on to me, only don't make me cut myself."

"Serve you right. A piece of wasteful extravagance paying wages to keep a valet whom you never make use of."

"My good nature, you see. I like to give other people happiness, and since I am per-

fectly well aware that Hopkins has no more exalted ideas of bliss than to have as little to do as possible, so that he may have more leisure to steal my handkerchiefs, and give the good folk of Sidcombe a treat, arrayed in my clothes——"

"Your clothes! how ridiculous! They would be worlds too wide for him."

"Don't interrupt me, my dear; disport himself in my clothes, as I was saying. Since such innocent amusements do not hurt me and give him pleasure, why, what I say is, let him steal the handkerchiefs and wear the clothes (he has them altered by the local tailor), rather than practise upon my throat; for you know, with the gay life he leads, he might do you a service and cut it."

"Horrible, horrible! Sir George, what is wrong with you this morning? I never remember having heard you talk such nonsense before."

"Nothing; only I can assure you that many wives would be delighted at the prospect of release held out to them. They would never

counsel my discharging so valuable an assistant as Hopkins. Unsteady hand—slip of the razor—all over—jury return verdict of accidental death."

"Do be rational for a few moments."

"Can't; I don't feel like it; impossible in fact.

'Oh! we'll all go a-hunting to-day,'"

sang the good-hearted baronet, whose peculiarity it was to dive into the middle of an air, roar out a line of it, and then break off as suddenly as he had begun.

"Now about Mr. Clarencourt. I may as well tell you. He shall flirt with Lilian no longer. This very day I shall bring him to book."

The dressing-room door creaked on its hinges, and Sir George, clad in shooting-coat, rough cord breeches, and boots, appeared in the presence of his wife. His face, which a moment before had been wreathed in smiles, now looked the picture of solemnity.

"Eh, my lady? What sentiment was that I heard you give vent to? Repeat it, please."

"Why, I observed that I intend to bring Mr. Clarencourt to book. That is all."

"Then *I* may as well observe, in my turn, that you will do nothing of the kind, though I would wish to be perfectly polite in doing so. Look here, if you are not alive to the fact that Lilian is not the same girl, and that these few weeks of daily intercourse with Clarencourt have worked wonders for her, *I am*. Doctors were useless. You won't argue on that point, I know, because we tried the first men of the day. Change of air failed—everything failed. Well; Clarencourt turns up and the cure is effected. Now, I forbid all coercion or interference, once and for all. Let them settle it between them. Clarencourt knows that there is no reason to fear opposition from us, or we should not have given him *carte blanche* to come and go as he pleased. He is a gentleman, every inch of him, and I covet nothing better for a son-in-law. As for that ass Ledsham, I can't bear the sight of him. Now you know my mind."

If Lady Fabyn remained unconvinced, at

all events she was silenced, and she only had time to stammer forth something in remonstrance, so confused had she become, when she discovered that she was the sole occupant of the room. The distant sounds of her husband's voice rang faintly in her ears, singing

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky,"

as conveyed to her through closed doors and winding passages, but his words were not lost upon her, even though their sole effect was to cause her to feel put out with him and things in general.

"What, up so early, all alone, and in a riding habit? Come and kiss me, Lilian," was Fabyn's greeting, as he entered the breakfast-room a moment afterwards.

"Yes, and looking rosy as of old," answered Lilian, gaily kissing him, and then returning to her occupation of pouring out coffee.

"Ah, Lilian, you are sly. Now I know where, or rather with whom you may be

found within an hour's time," laughed the baronet good-humouredly.

"I fear in a moment of weakness I told you too much, and in return you tease me."

"Not I, my darling. All I have in this world I would barter gladly to give you a happy future. But when one or other of these lucky dogs contrives to steal you from me, you won't forget that I too love you, though in a different way."

"How could I ever be so ungrateful?"

"No! thank God, such ingratitude is not in you, but do you know, Lilian, that to see health and strength come back to you is like a new span of life to me. I have felt like a different man. For none knew what I suffered when you were ailing; it was like sapping my heart's blood when your cheek paled, and I watched your limbs grow thin and your fingers become transparent. I would not go over it again for anything that earth could give me."

"Well, let us bury the past; to me it all seems one long weird dream, overshadowed with a sense of hopelessness I dread to think of.

Come; you are responsible for this revelation, dear father, since you wormed my secret from me, but don't laugh at my silly remarks."

"Laugh! to hear you chatter makes me feel young again."

"But how is this? Arrayed in hunting dress!"

"Oh! only an old pair of breeches, my dear. More comfortable, you know, than loose things."

"What are you going to do? Come with Ger—I mean Mr. Clarencourt and me."

"Not I. Why, what an old booby you must deem me! I recollect a saying we were fond of in my early days, about 'two being company and three none.' No, no. To-day I've got up a meet of the otter hounds, and I fancy we shall have some sport. There now, don't let me detain you. I can take care of myself; but I'll put you into the saddle, and then come back and finish breakfast."

With his kind face radiant with good nature, Sir George courteously handed his daughter down the steps, helped her to

mount, and with a wave of his hand gazed after her figure, as it swayed with each movement of her horse, until lost round a turn of the drive. It is generally admitted that grooms are often better mounted than their mistresses. Be that as it may, Lilian completely distanced her attendant, she felt so light-hearted, so full of hope. That morning the very trees seemed greener, and the birds she thought sang more sweetly than was their wont. She was going to meet *him*, and that constituted the sum total of all earthly happiness to her. Breathless from her exertions, she drew bridle at the corner of the spinney, where Gerard had arranged to be at a certain time.

"Not here," she said to herself impatiently, whilst glancing at her watch. "What has detained him?"

It was a bad omen, as would have occurred to her had she known more of such matters, for men in love are seldom late without good reasons. But she was contented. He would come. She was sure of it. Even as she

thought thus, and allowed her horse to nibble the tender shoots of the hawthorn hedge which fenced in the plantation, the dull thud of hoofs, drawing nearer and nearer, smote upon her ear. He approached at a gallop, crashed his way through the undergrowth, until at length a few yards and the hedge alone divided them.

"Look out, Lilian; I'm going to rush the fence."

"No, don't; you may come to grief. The hard road, the ditch and the down hill drop. Don't, Gerard."

But he was by her side before the words had well left her lips.

"Oh, I have nothing to fear with Bourton; he can jump anything. It is a question of straight steering more than anything else; no matter how big the fence; send him at it, let him *feel* that you mean him to clear it neck or nothing, and he'll land you safe," exclaimed Gerard, as he reined up and patted the horse he bestrode—a powerful bay hunter, with black points.

"How rash of you to ride at a nasty place place like that! You might have injured yourself for life." Lilian looked at him as she spoke, and he might have read her thoughts in the depths of her hazel eyes, for fear and interest in him had caused her to betray more of her real feelings than she would have cared to show when in a calmer mood, but a stirrup leather absorbed his attention, and she regained her self-possession.

"Sorry I am late."

"Oh, I didn't mind waiting," answered Lilian, with simple truth, for love such as hers never wearies, and had he but come at last she would have thought her hours well spent in watching for him.

"I rode fast and left Withers behind," she continued, "but where shall we go?"

"Any way you like."

"Is the tide low?"

"Yes."

"Then let us try the sands."

"The sands be it then," answered Gerard lightly, yet whilst he spoke the thought

entered his heart as he glanced at her smiling face, tinted with a delicate colouring, which to other eyes would have told of a fragile constitution, "How little she thinks as I ride by her side, with a jest and a laugh for everything—outwardly bearing no burden, exposed only to the glare of fortune's sunshine—that blighted as my hopes are at twenty-four, I long even for the hand of death itself rather than endure the suffering that each day stores up for me, without possibility of reprieve, imprisoned by that hell of thought which tells me that to attempt to live it down is as useless as to try to think that future years have aught of good in store for me!"

So wags the world, and through it we voyage, each thinking himself most miserable, and deserving of pity, rearing our heads to battle with tempestuous waters, rough winds, a veritable Hades; and yet he who fights on to the end must gain the smooth blue waters of the lagoon which lie inside the breakers.

By Gerard's side rode the woman who had learned to love him well, yet whom he would have quitted without thought to join *her* who, scarce a mile distant, languished for that which she believed her coldness had destroyed, whilst he, unconscious that he had ever awakened an interest in her heart, judging her as he had a right to judge, went his way with an outward semblance of mirth, masking a heart faint and weary under the woe it grappled with.

"Why don't you talk?" Lilian ventured to ask at length, tired of waiting for words which came not. "I never remember having seen you in such a quiet mood."

"How quick you are to notice small things!" he answered irritably, roused from his unpleasant recollections by the abruptness of her remark.

"Am I?—then forgive me. I only feared that perhaps you had received bad news, or that you were annoyed with some one—*me*, for instance."

"*You!*—how should I be?" asked Gerard, absently.

"It is impossible for me to say. Have I put you out?"

"How kind and considerate to speak to me so gently! No, I assure you. Because I am like a bear with a sore head, you are not to blame."

"Comparisons are odious, therefore do not attempt to draw them. You see that huge piece of black rock yonder?" she added, indicating with her whip a great block of limpet-covered stone which the storms that swept over the coast had detached from some hidden reef; "now, see—I will race you to it and back here again for——"

"Some gloves, or scent, or——"

"Friendship," she interrupted.

"Say, rather—love. But who is to start us?"

"*I* will, and the wager shall be for love. Come back here, sir; we will be equal at the outset, and remember you will get no quarter—I mean, we run on our merits. Now, I

shall drop this handkerchief. So, are you ready?"

"Quite," answered Gerard, laughing, despite the gloom he felt, and thinking how pretty she was, and what a dear little wife she would make for the lucky man who might win her.

"Again, are you ready? Then one, two, three—off!"

Down fluttered the broidered lace cambric graven with her monogram in finest stitches, sewn with her own fingers; and away they went at topmost speed, careering madly over the yellow stretch of sand, crunching and destroying as they went myriad specimens of pink and pearl-hued shells, shrivelled starfish, and tiny living crabs, victims to the receding waves. Ah! what a glorious morning that was! and how it lived in the minds of both!—blue sky; blue, foam-flecked waves; the distant headlands and the long range of dark red cliffs, bathed in a warm mist, exhaled alike from land and water; bright, golden sunlight streaming down, cresting

with its dazzling rays the ocean spray, as, high in air, it burst and broke upon the beach.

"How lovely it is!" sighed Lilian, as her senses drank in the freshness of the breeze. "I could stay here for ever. I never tire of scenery such as this. What a subject for a painting! That great, jagged piece of wreckage, covered with weed and barnacles; those brown-legged shrimping-girls, flaxen-haired, sun-tanned, and clad in frocks, gay-coloured, yet mellowed by exposure to wind and rain. How stupid of me to run on like this!—it must weary you," she added, breaking off abruptly in her description of the scene, which, in its peace and beauty, was, in truth, worthy of the praise she had lavished on it.

"Stupid of you? No, quite the reverse. I was listening to every word you said, and so vivid was your description that I had almost begun to see a canvas converted into the nearest approach to a thing of life. Then fancy conjured to my mind

Bond Street, strings of carriages, the pavements packed with people, gay shops and charming costumes, but in striking contrast, a long line of weary, ragged, hungry-looking wretches (commonly known as sandwich men, you know), groping their way grimly and in silence, bearing on their backs an advertisement commencing 'Great picture ——'"

"Now you are teasing me, and I won't put up with it."

"No, but honestly, it did me good to watch your eyes sparkle, and your face light up. You entered into every word you said, and meant it too ——"

"Of course I did. I love nature, and find something to admire in every leaf and flower. The sea is never the same two days in succession. There are different lights and shadows, incessant movement with a sense of peace, and the sound of the waves as they break upon the sand is sweetest music to me. But place me in the heart of London and a feeling of oppression damps my spirits. I gasp for air, I long to be alone, away from

the rush of wheels and the clamour of tongues. Now you can understand that I really meant what I said about being in town, when I wrote to you in Calcutta."

Gerard did not answer her. Her remark set him thinking of the change that had come over him since he had read that brief note. He remembered how pleased he had been to hear from her, his own comments at the time, and his ideas ran on in the one groove until he was recalled from the visionary past back to the stern realities of the present by Lilian demanding a reply to her remarks.

"What is the matter with you? Really, I never saw you so preoccupied. You have had no bad news, I hope?"

"None."

"Then I am curious to know what has wrought this wondrous change. You are generally so merry. Now you act and speak as though something were pressing upon your mind."

"Well, and so there is."

"Then confess it," stammered Lilian, the

colour mounting to her cheek the moment after she had spoken, and her pulse quickening from sheer expectation of what that confession might be, and a terrible doubt as to whether he would think her immodest for so unblushingly asking him to tell her his secret thoughts.

"Well, my position is not altered in any way since yesterday, but perhaps I am absent because I am contemplating a change," Gerard answered, slowly gathering up his reins afresh, and stooping to stroke the smooth satin skin of Bourton's proudly arched neck.

"Contemplating a move! What can he mean?" Lilian asked herself, the rosy blush leaving her face as quickly as it had come. Something seemed to whisper to her in those few seconds of silence which ensued that sorrow was at hand. She tried to stay the wild flutterings of her heart, and brace her nerves to hear the worst. Outwardly she was calm as she turned to him, though scarce knowing what she said.

"What do you mean by a move?"

"A peregrination, a trip abroad, a voyage," answered Gerard lightly. "You see, I am subject to periodical fits of gloom—and at such times the best cure I know is to travel, or do anything to forget myself. You will laugh at me, I fear," he added nervously, never once raising his eyes to look at the anguish-stricken face of the girl at his side. And so this was what her inmost soul had dreaded, this was the blow presentiment had warned her to expect. Well, it was heavy enough. She cared for the man so much, and had allowed herself to think that he loved her in return. They had been happy together. Ah! So very happy, and was it all to end like this? But he waited for an answer, and she would not disgrace her race. She would rather die than he should know her heart had yearned for his.

"Laugh at you? Oh, no! That would be impossible."

"Why?"

"Because I sympathize."

"Thanks. I knew I might tell you. But your life surely has been free from—from grief or worry of any sort. It is true you have had ill health of late, but you are getting stronger."

"Yes." She could say no more. It was terrible to ride by his side, to be obliged to listen to all he had to say, and find an answer somehow, when every sentence which fell from his lips were as the keen stabs of a knife, only that they left her with life though they robbed her of the sunshine.

"Yes; I shall go abroad for a time, and I shall return to find you stronger than ever. But you won't forget me, will you?"

"No; we have known each other too long for that to happen," she answered, with her face averted to hide from him the emotion which she knew was written there too plainly not to betray her.

"True; and never forget one thing, Lilian. If there is a soul on earth I count on as a true friend it is yourself. However harshly others

may judge, through evil or good repute, you will think kindly of me. But, pshaw! What a fool I am! I might be wishing you good-bye; but I can say anything to you, I know. These quiet days spent together have been bright and happy, and with all my heart I regret to say farewell to them, even for a while, and yet I feel I must. My life has not been as free from anxiety as it might. It is true one ought not to growl; and heaps of people think me a lucky fellow, but they don't know all. You see that plough-boy sitting under the hedge there, probably dining off a chunk of bread and some slices of the proverbial fat bacon; well, I would not mind changing places with him. His epidermis is, I have no doubt, thicker than mine; at least, culture has not taught him to be susceptible, and so I would wager he is the happier of the two."

Quickly she turned towards him, her own sorrow forgotten for the instant in her commiseration for him.

"I thought you were free from trials, com-

paratively speaking, but you are unhappy. Tell me the cause, and let me be of use to you."

"Kind and true, as I have ever known you. But it cannot be, at least, not now. Some day I will tell you all; for the present believe in me, and try to think that my gloomy conversation was due to ill-temper — anything you like—only find an excuse for me and forget it."

Forget! Ah, how much that single word of two short syllables meant to her! Life would be worth living, the birds would sing as gaily, the trees would seem as green as they had done only an hour ago, could she but feel that it were possible to forget, and yet her heart told her otherwise. But this was infinite torture—to converse with him as though nothing had happened, to feel that the one great comfort of her existence had been wrenched from her, that she loved in vain; not to be alone to bear her wretchedness in secret was maddening, and she felt her fortitude was not equal to such

a strain. She should break down, and he would know all. A happy expedient occurred to her. She burst into a satirical laugh.

"I will think anything you wish. But since our gallops together are to be few and far between, let us race back to the gates, or as far as the turf extends. Come along." She waited for no reply, but shot past him like an arrow from a bow, and Gerard put spurs to his horse and followed her, with a weight at his own heart that would have been heavier had he known that the light, girlish figure on ahead would ride with him no more, and that he had dealt out her death-blow.

CHAPTER IX.

A GUEST AT THE "GREYHOUND."

Not an instant after Gerard had ridden past the small wicket gate which led down by the side of the bridge to the river, Colonel Steele stepped out into the road.

"He's a bad 'un, I know, whoever he is; shows the whites of his eyes in nasty fashion, he do," exclaimed Withers to himself, as he cantered leisurely along, content if he could keep in sight of his mistress without putting himself out. "Didn't think he'd be seen, I suppose, 'cause I'd dropped so far behind. Oh, he's artful, or my name ain't Joe Withers." And he was perfectly right in his conjectures, in more ways than one. Steele had just left Ada Devereaux, whom he had ventured to call upon thus early in the day under cover of presenting a basket of fruit and

flowers. Hearing the sound of horses' hoofs, he had kept out of the way until, as he had believed, all danger of being recognized had past. He had been venting his spleen upon Gerard's flying figure in anything but choice language, and with a decidedly evil look on his face, which the groom had seen as he approached on the soft turf unheard until within a few yards of where he stood.

"Confound that fellow! Who would have thought that he was lagging so far behind?" muttered the colonel, as he strode off towards the town. "I should like to be even with you, Mr. Gerard Clarencourt, and it strikes me I shall be, too, before you and I are many hours older. I know he *was* in love with the woman," he continued, thinking of Ada Devereaux. "A sort of blind worship, I should say. Object of affection too good and pure, eh, to be approached. That is just what a namby-pamby chap like Clarencourt would think. He'd give something, I shrewdly suspect, to learn that she is so near at hand. Well, by the time he does I sha'n't mind turning her

over to him. Useful to take her off my hands. Women are apt to become troublesome. I'm a lucky dog, and no mistake, but there's nothing out of the common in that. I always was." Thus conversing with himself, and chuckling over the probable success of his evil design, Steele threaded his way through two or three narrow streets, and entered the railway station, which he had approached by a short cut. Now if there was any particular event worthy of note occurring in Sidcombe through the twenty-four hours it was the arrival of the London trains, which were, comparatively speaking, few and far between. However, at such a time, and often hanging about for many minutes beforehand, were to be seen groups of expectant Sidcombites, drawn together expressly for the purpose of feasting their eyes upon any unfortunate London swells to whom the possession of time and money had suggested a few days' outing. Of course Steele had not come there with any such idea. He had ordered something at the bookstall,

and had looked in on his way to the club with the intention of paying for his purchase, but whilst he was thus engaged, the train steamed in, emitting clouds of vapour. The carriage doors were at once besieged by porters, even before it had stopped, and in another moment the platform was littered with the unhappy passengers' effects —at least, when the word "unhappy" is made use of, it is only intended to describe the feelings of those who were perfectly certain that *something* was missing.

"This all your luggage?" inquired a porter of a quietly-dressed man who had alighted from a third-class compartment, holding up for inspection a leathern portmanteau as he spoke. But no answer was accorded him, and the traveller continued to gaze in the direction of the bookstall, as though he could not take his eyes off it.

"Good heavens! I am right. It *is* Steele," at length he muttered under his breath, then suddenly recollecting that the man's question

demanded an answer, he paused for a moment as though in thought.

"Here, my good fellow, put that down. Go and get me some matches, and you will find me in the waiting-room, yonder," he replied calmly, taking the package from the man's hand, and striding into the doorway he had indicated. "Steele here, then once more we meet, thank God. But he must not recognize me, or learn that I am in this place —anything but that."

Quick as thought, he detached the label which bore his name, "Geoffrey Carelesse," upon it, and put it in his pocket.

"I must send this luggage to some hotel, for I have a fancy to keep you in sight, *mon commandant.*"

"Here are the matches, sir."

Carelesse slipped them into his pocket, and felt for some coin at the same time.

"What hotels are there here? I wish to be quiet, and I want you to see that this portmanteau is sent on, and engage a bedroom for me."

"The Greyhound, first-rate house, nice and quiet, sir. There ain't a better nor a cheaper hotel in Sidcombe."

"Very well; I will leave it to you."

The man walked off, turning the coin Carelesse had given to him over in his hand.

"Half-a-crown! Now that's what I likes. 'Ee's a gentleman, 'ee is, or I've never see'd one afore."

Left alone, Carelesse waited until Steele quitted the station, and then, as soon as he could without attracting notice, he followed, carefully keeping out of sight, until he saw him enter a white painted house.

"What building is that, my good fellow?" he inquired of a fisherman who sat balanced on the gunwale of his boat, which was hauled up on the beach.

"What? That one there, sir?" asked the man, pointing to it.

"Yes, the one with the balcony and striped awning."

"Folks hereabouts calls it the Club."

"Thanks, I am much obliged." And so they can boast of a club-house," Carelesse said to himself, as he sauntered away, having inquired for the nearest road to the Greyhound. "Well, he won't disappear without rhyme or reason. The chances are he has taken up his abode here and is a member. Anyhow, I shall risk losing sight of him, and go back to the hotel, if I can find it, for something to eat."

The reason why Geoffrey Carelesse had so unexpectedly turned up at Sidcombe, was entirely owing to the fact that he possessed a retentive memory. It had occurred to him that Sidcombe was the name of the town near which Gerard Clarencourt had told him he resided. He wished to find Clarencourt, because he hoped to gain through him some news of Ada Devereaux, and with that object in view he had studied a map, found out the place, and acted upon the off-chance the following morning. Taking his ticket, and having made himself as comfortable as the draughts and other disagreeables

of a third-class smoking carriage would allow, he had come upon the scene as recounted, Geoffrey Carelesse was essentially a jealous man, and of an extremely suspicious disposition. It was as natural for him to think that men meant to act meanly by him, or in case of a love affair, meditated some foul wrong, as it would have been in another person to credit them with good intentions until he had proved that they were not worthy of his confidence. To many a one, the fact of seeing or meeting a man, whether he happened to be friend or foe, at a place of general resort, such as a railway station, would have occasioned no surprise. By Carelesse, any such trivial circumstance was associated with a great number of possibilities, which took the form of suspicions. Of course, in Steele's case, many excuses might have been found, but, no sooner had he recognized him, who, above all others, had proved himself to be his worst enemy, than he at once connected his presence there

with Ada Devereaux. The more he pondered on it, the more convinced he became, and before he had reached his halting-place for the night, he had made up his mind on three very important points. First, he would, for the present, resume his own family name of Dailey, abandoned solely on account of his uncle's wishes. Secondly, he would not seek to see Gerard Clarencourt until he had ascertained why a man of Colonel Steele's habits and mode of life, took the trouble to absent himself from London during the season. And, thirdly, he would probe deep, and spare neither time nor labour, to discover what had induced the scoundrel who had ruined him to take up his quarters in such an out-of-the-way place, and should he find his far-fetched and almost unreasonable conjectures to be true basis, he promised himself the pleasure of investing in a well-made hand-whip, which he would take very good care should be brought into immediate contact with the shoulders of his late superior officer, in a style that he might not altogether like.

"We meet on equal terms here. He has done his worst, and now I will have what little revenge I can get, though it cost me my last sovereign to pay for it. There is not much in my power, for he will survive a thrashing, but it may humble him in his own estimation, and teach him to be more just to others in the future. A poor recompense for the evil he has done me—the pitiful hound; but it will give me *some* satisfaction if nothing else. But should he have played her——Oh! I cannot think of it."

Meditating thus, Geoffrey Carelesse sat down before the humble fare he had ordered in the coffee-room of the Greyhound Hotel, or, more properly speaking, inn, for certainly it had no pretensions to the higher sounding title. A tough beefsteak, some ill-cooked potatoes, and a jug of home-brewed ale; the best lunch that he could afford to pay for, he who had been bred to look upon luxury as his right, whose extravagancies had been fostered as the acknowledged heir of a rich man. It was hard luck, to say the least of it,

and Carelesse felt it as he consumed the unpalatable fare. But he was in no mood for grumbling, his mind was too full of the events of the day to allow of his venting his grievances by such a display of weakness. Often, when over-excited, there is a lack of all appetite, the palate refuses to be coaxed into a craving for food, let the viands be what they may. Such was the case with Carelesse; after a few mouthfuls he pushed his plate aside and fell to thinking in good earnest. Somehow the day sped by, and again the shroud of night enveloped sea and land. The lights burned brightly in the club windows, and Carelesse, unable to forego his intentions even for a few hours, resumed his observations from an iron seat on the Esplanade placed in a convenient position, so that as he solaced himself with a cigar he could not fail to see all who went in or came out. Before he retired to rest that evening, fortune aided him again, and he had ascertained beyond a doubt the house in which Steele lived. Satisfied with his

efforts, and wearied with excitement and exertion, at length he forgot his wrongs in sleep.

CHAPTER X.

"AT LAST WE MEET."

To a woman of Ada Devereaux's temperament it would have been unnatural to succumb to the difficulties or disappointments which surrounded her. After the first wild outburst of grief on learning her doom, as it were, from Gerard's own lips was over, she suffered, and perhaps all the more keenly because no tears came to relieve her overtaxed brain, as would have been the case with a mind less capable of control. Her heart told her that she alone was to blame —that she had herself to thank in having flung from her such a love as only comes to a woman once in a lifetime. Before that morning on which she had sallied out to breathe the air laden with the fragrant sweetness of spring-tide, she had told herself

that her path in life, her duty, was clearly marked. She must wait and watch for his home-coming, setting up before her that pole star—Hope. She was ready to confess her love, to throw herself at his feet and ask forgiveness; but there was one obstacle which seemed an insurmountable barrier to such a course—Gerard's wealth. How should she ask him to take her back to his heart? Would he not think that the riches, which she had discovered he possessed, by her sojourn in Sidcombe, alone prompted her to sue for a reconciliation; and if he thought that, where would be the use of such a step? Her only chance of proving herself worthy of him would be lost. No; she must remain silent, and trust to time and circumstances to reunite them. He would return from abroad, and his love and hers must do the rest, aided by some incident which should throw them together, but the first advances must come from him. And then, as if to scatter even that faint glimmer of hope which lightened her daily load, had come that early saunter,

when she had pondered upon these things, lost even to the brightness of the sunlight as it danced upon the deep brown pools, and fell with its radiance upon each sparkling dew-drop. Under the russet-stemmed larches she had walked with her heart full of him. And what had been the end of it all? His words had smote upon her ear with a crushing weight of woe, and she had gone home with her burden well-nigh heavier than she could bear, to repeat to herself, "*She has passed for ever from his life.*" "Ah! well, I have *you* still, come what may," she had murmured as the hours had fled, leaving her calmer, and she had strained her boy to her bosom, and covered him with kisses. The fact that a strange lady had come to reside in the neighbourhood had rapidly passed from the minds of the residents and towns-folk of Sidcombe, those who were aware of her advent, ceasing to remember the circumstance because there was nothing to arouse their curiosity. And so Ada Devereaux had lived by the river banks,

unknown, uncared-for, and glad to remain so, since she knew the hollowness of the world. After she became aware of Gerard's presence she would have gone away, spurred by the pride which rebelled at the idea that he should ever think she had sought him, but where was she to obtain the money to pay for such an extravagance? No; she must stay on and bear the brunt of whatever might happen now. Women can read each other, though to men they must ever be as a turned-down page, and as Ada Devereaux had parted the hazel boughs with her hand, and gazed down upon Lilian's face, she had not mistaken the light that shone in her eyes, and another thorn had been planted in her side, for she was sure that the girl loved Gerard. And so, running rife within her brain, and sapping the light from her existence were three incentives to love—regret, jealousy, and wounded pride. The prize that she had cast from her—the fear that it was already within the grasp of another—the

sting of remembering that he had had the strength to leave her. But that very fact had served to open her eyes, and caused her to recognize the nobility of a love willing to give all things, yet too sensitive and proud to accept less in return. The man who would have been content with what it pleased her to fling him in the way of affection, happy if he might but see her face, and breathe the same air, would have had no power to charm a wayward disposition such as hers. She would never have known what love meant had it not been her fate to meet one of stern stuff, who would accept nothing less from her than *all*. The warm air, sweet with the scent of blossoms, fanned her cheeks as she sat discussing her simple morning meal, and then, after attending to her household duties, went out into the garden. A growing sense of loneliness had stolen upon her of late, and her weariness had made her fretful.

"What a charming morning!" said a voice

from the other side of the low sweetbrier hedge, and in another moment her hand was inclosed in that of Colonel Steele's. She had given instructions that she was at home to no one, on purpose to escape his attentions, and it annoyed her to be waylaid the moment she left the house.

"Yes, I was enjoying the fresh sea breeze," she answered, embarrassed spite of herself. Why did this man seek her so persistently? Had she not been at pains to show him in a thousand different ways that his presence was distasteful to her? At first, it was true, she had felt glad to be able to exchange opinions with one in her own sphere of life, but, emboldened by his seeming success, Steele had presumed too much, and in consequence she had determined to check the advances which daily grew more irksome.

"I brought these violets for you," he said as he handed her a tiny basket of the purple blossoms.

"Thanks! it is very kind of you, but you forget I have more flowers than I can

gather, besides I would rather you would give them to others. If you wish to be generous, spend your money on the scores of sufferers who are sick and dying in the London hospitals, to whom their delicate perfume would give pleasure."

In the old days, she herself would not have thought of such a simple kindness. Steele fidgeted uneasily.

"Oh, I'm no saint, and it did not occur to me. I never saw you look so serious. Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"No, thank you, Colonel Steele."

"Deuced high and haughty," thought the colonel, as he stole a glance of unconcealed admiration, and noticed the graceful outline of her figure as he dropped behind a pace.

"To you surely this place is the essence of dulness, although I have never been able to persuade you to admit as much."

"No; because I do not feel it so."

"It is inexplicable."

"Why?" asked Ada, wishing with all her heart that he would go, and thinking at the

same time that she might with gain to herself eschew society, if the male portion of it consisted of men of Steele's type.

"How can you ask me?"

"But I do."

"You, a leader of fashion, courted and admired."

"You flatter me."

"Pardon me, I do not. It is true, and flattery never is."

"Well?"

"You turn your back upon the world, depriving it of the sunshine of your presence."

"A very pretty compliment."

"Nay, hear me out. And, having done so, you affirm that you prefer being mewed up in a hole like this to joining in the gaieties of the season. Again I repeat; to me, it is inexplicable."

"Perhaps I have wearied of the insincerity I encountered at every turn. It may be difficult to understand my preference for seclusion, but it exists, nevertheless."

Steele made no immediate answer; he was

thinking over certain projects he had in view, in which Ada Devereaux was to be honoured by an offer of the leading *rôle*. One striking idiosyncrasy in his character was a firm belief in his own powers of fascinating the fair sex in general. It only remained for him to take the trouble to exert himself, and straightway they fell victims to his attractions. He had concentrated all his energies upon the subjugation of this woman, but how he succeeded, remains to be told.

On the opposite side of the river, where Sir George Fabyn's property sloped down to the water's edge, Lilian walked to and fro. The path she had chosen was a secluded one, walled in by sweet smelling flowering shrubs, and huge specimens of rhododendrons, showing to what wondrous perfection culture could bring them; and half buried in a tangled mass of creepers and lemon-scented verbena, lurked the very perfection of a rustic summer arbour. Weary of being questioned by her mother, and troubled by the kindly glances of Sir George, who was

beside himself to account for the change a few hours had wrought in his daughter's face, Lilian had sought the spot in quest of solitude. She looked pale and care-worn; her brown eyes were heavy with weeping and want of sleep, and underlined by dark circles. The colour in her cheeks, delicate as the petals of a blush rose, had gathered in a hectic flush, and to account for it all she had given out that riding had of late been too much for her, and that her altered appearance was due solely to exertion. She had sat herself down at length in the arbour, midst the clustering leaves which covered the roof and strayed in through the trellised sides. How long she had been there she knew not; her thoughts were bitter ones, and the tears coursed down her cheeks and forced their way through her fingers as she buried her face in her hands. A picture of grief, surely; but it appealed to no hidden chord of sympathy, it had no part or parcel with a nature such as the Honourable Jim Ledsham was possessed of. He could see her

plainly enough as he peered through the trailing tendrils of clematis; but the sight only served to suffuse his countenance with a sarcastic smile. Why had he come there? He had learned something which filled him with malicious pleasure, "now that the game was up," as he phrased it, and he sought to convey that news in person, as retailed to him by Julie.

"Now that's a sight that would have suited a man like Job better than me," he thought, as he regarded Lilian through the medium of his eye-glass.

"Better let the gov'nor cut me off with a shilling (lucky he can't, though) than marry a woman given to piping her eye like that. Wonder what's in the wind now. That chap Clarencourt's thrown her over, I suppose; confound his cheek for interfering. Like him, that, to spoil another fellow's game when he can't enter stakes himself. If it's all up with me, it is; if not, well and good. Anyhow, what I'm going to tell her will be a treat to her *and to me*, for, hang it, I believe she loves the fellow."

Ledsham had known perfectly well that under existing circumstances he could not present himself at the house and ask for an interview; and what he had to say he intended for her private ear *first*, so he entered the grounds from the riverside, crossing the stream by the wooden bridge, on the off-chance of finding her in what he well knew was one of her favourite haunts, intending to return in the same way if he failed to see her. Fortune had favoured him, or, rather, chance smiled upon his evil designs. Well, he would make his presence known; so he coughed, and then stood full in the doorway of the summer-house, dropped his glass, and raised his hat.

"Sorry to see you so troubled, Miss Fabyn, but——"

Lilian started as though an adder had stung her. It was intensely humiliating to be caught in tears; but though her pulse beat violently, her pride aided her efforts to appear calm.

"To what am I entitled for this visit, Mr.

Ledsham, may I inquire; for I am at a loss to understand why you have followed me here?"

"Certainly; I will tell you."

"Do, please, and in as few words as possible," she said, passing her handkerchief across her face as she spoke; "but I would rather you had the goodness to spare me the pain of an interview."

"Pain, Miss Fabyn?"

"Yes."

"I shall hope that you will think differently, when you have heard me to the end."

"It is impossible."

"Well, you must remember I have had no chance of seeing you of late. I believe some confounded mischief has been at work ever since that beggar Clarencourt came upon the scene."

"I must request you to refrain from mentioning his name, since he is not here to speak for himself."

"I would to heaven he were!"

"Let me pass. I do not choose to remain here longer to listen to——"

"No! I must ask you to give me a fair hearing."

Lilian stood in front of him, but his figure blocked the only means of exit.

"I want to tell you something, and I won't even mention his name if——"

"Mr. Ledsham; if you have one vestige of gentlemanly feeling left in you, you will let me go," answered Lilian, with flashing eyes.

"A favourite expression of yours. Do you remember telling me I was a disgrace to my order?"

"I remember nothing."

"Well, I do, but I forgive, and will strive to forget it if—Lilian, I love you," he added, suddenly breaking off in his sentence as he gazed into her eyes and the passion kindled in his own; "I love you," he repeated, and before Lilian could evade his grasp, he had encircled her with his arm, and drawn her towards him.

"Coward! I am alone and defenceless," exclaimed Lilian, as she struggled to free

herself. "Again I tell you, you disgrace your name and rank. My own father would horsewhip you; or—or the man you have dared——"

"Curses! then you shall hear it all," answered the Honourable Jim, as he threw her from him. "Hear how this villain Clarencourt has lied to you. Told you he loved you, I suppose, and—and would——"

"Silence!"

"And cajoled you into thinking that he will marry you. A very pretty farce, and one worthy of him."

"Another brilliant trait in your character, to slander those who (providentially for you) are absent," replied Lilian, beside herself with passion at hearing Gerard so spoken of.

"Lucky for *him* you mean."

"Insolent——"

"Why, deuce take him. The man has insulted you by every attention he has had the impertinence to offer to you."

Lilian felt that to fly into a rage only placed her at a disadvantage, so she retaliated

as best she could, heedless of his words and the insinuations they contained.

"He is not here to defend himself, but he is near at hand, and, if you seek him, I am confident he will prove himself man enough to chastise one who insults a woman who cannot demand reparation by force."

"Look here, you love this fellow. I am perfectly well aware of it, and therefore the gratification I have in informing you that he can never be yours is immense."

Lilian gasped. This was a blow she had little expected, but he should not have the satisfaction of seeing her dismay; besides, she did not believe the empty aspersion, unsupported as it was by facts.

"Listen to me, Miss Fabyn." Vicious malice gleamed in Ledsham's eyes as he spoke. "I shall be pleased, I may say charmed, to place before you ample proofs of what I have come to tell you; and so, without backing it up with my word of honour, which you might choose to think lightly of, I may at once disclose it. *Gerard Clarencourt is married.*"

"It is false."

"Of course. I knew that is what you would say, but I repeat I can prove my words; and now I have trespassed upon your time and attention too long, I fear. I hope I have not wearied you, and I would ask you to permit me to wish you *au revoir*."

To a weak constitution, such as Lilian Fabyn's, the blow was a terrible one. A woman of a different stamp would have withstood it; but to her it felt like depriving her of life itself. She had loved so fondly, she had endured so much, for his sake, and now to find that——

"No, no! it cannot be true; it *cannot* be true," she moaned in her anguish as she sank back in her wicker chair, with a feeling as though her very heart would refuse to do its office. The Honourable Jim stayed long enough before he took himself off, to gloat over the mischief he had wrought.

"Faith, revenge is sweet," he said to himself as he lit a cigarette and strolled leisurely away, with the intention of lunching at the

club, and afterwards beguiling the hours with billiards, baccarat, or anything that would serve to kill time. The pale blue smoke of his Turkish cigarette curled upwards from under his moustache, and floated away midst the bright green of the spring buds; and the coward who emitted it from his mouth with the air of a sybarite, smiled with satisfaction at the noble part he had played in having wounded the heart of a gentle and loving girl. The club had gradually become a favourite resort amongst the male portion of the rank and fashion of Sidcombe; men who owned racing yachts, perfect of their kind, anchored in the bay, came ashore, and spent best part of their time there, jesting with each other, or stretched full length, gazed seawards, through the sunlight, away over the sparkling water. Thither Steele had bent his steps, by no means well pleased with his morning's work, doubtful for once in his life whether he had not overrated his knowledge of women, and ability to deal with them. He had never met one *quite* like Ada Devereaux before, and he had

thought she was different. Still, he was half disposed to pooh-pooh the rebuffs he had encountered, and by the time he had regaled himself with sundry brandies-and-sodas, was ready, as usual, to swear that all women were alike. As the evening waxed late, the fun grew fast and furious, owing to the advent of some men who had come ashore from a smart rakish schooner. They had sailed over from New York for a wager, put in to Sidcombe as the nearest port offering good anchorage, owing to a sudden fall in the temperature, a dead head wind, and to escape the prospect, which seemed certain as the day wore on, of a dirty night in the Channel. They had won their money, had found snug quarters, men they knew, and were in a mood to be merry. If Steele had any two vices which he loved to carry to excess more than others, they were his passion for cards and gambling. He would have played, had luck been against him, until his last sovereign had been staked and lost, but his temper when engaged in a losing game knew no bounds.

The blinds were drawn down in the card room, and a thin vapour of smoke hung over the shaded lamps, which threw a subdued light around the room and on the faces of the men who reclined on the velvet lounges, telling of the last great scandal, which hit hard the fair fame of a great lady and a noble duke; or conversed in whispers of the possible course events might take in the East, owing to the last masterpiece of Russian intrigue.

"Have you shuffled the cards? Double or quits, I suppose?"

"I mark the king," said Steele, as he and the Honourable Jim played *écarté* together at one of the side tables. A confusing jargon of disconnected sentences were heard.

"You think so?"

"I am confident."

"What about the boat-race?"

"You have keen wit, but——"

"Tell him what you think, D'Estcourt."

"And what is that?"

"Why, that your women are beautiful, but

they have no staying power; they fade too soon."

"I guess——"

"Ah, here is Clarencourt. Come here, my boy. I have something to tell you at which you will prick up your ears," called out Steele, as Gerard entered, rising from his chair with a droll mixture of passion dulled by wine.

"Well, colonel," answered Gerard gravely, obliged against his will to speak, and merely recognizing Ledsham's presence by a cold bow.

"Your pardon, Ledsham, one moment."

"Certainly."

Steele drew Clarencourt aside as he spoke, and buttonholed him until they stood together in one of the windows which opened on to the balcony.

"Ah; now we are alone. You remember that woman who broke all our hearts in Calcutta?"

"Of whom do you speak?" asked Gerard, as his pulse beat like lightning, and his voice became husky with a sudden powerful emotion he could ill control.

"Oh, don't you recollect? I shall endeavour to recall her to your memory," replied Steele, sneering maliciously as he spoke. "You remember the night I met you in the Eden gardens with Carelesse?"

"Perfectly well."

"Ah, you sly dog! Then your heart has not recovered from the shock it received from that moonlight *tête-à-tête* with ——"

"Whom? Speak, for the love of God!" Clarencourt clutched his arm in his eagerness.

"Just as I thought; just as I thought," leered the colonel, insolently, as he read Clarencourt's expression. "One moment, Ledsham, one moment. I have a rare joke on here."

"Jests are occasionally ill-timed, Colonel Steele." Gerard's face clouded as he spoke.

"But not this one. Now about Ada Devereaux ——"

"What of her?"

"Ah, she is well, beautiful as ever; and (better than all, you will say) *here*."

"Hush! lower your voice; those men can hear. In Sidcombe, you say?"

"Yes." Steele chuckled with inward delight. It was in his power to deal this man a blow, to whom he had taken such a dislike. Then assuredly it should be dealt, but slowly, so that he might watch him writhe under it.

"You love her?" he inquired.

"What the devil is that to you?"

"Oh, don't be so high-handed, my boy; other people have succumbed to her fascinations. What a glorious figure! I seem to see her as I talk to you—dear little waist, and such a charming foot and ankle—reminds one of those supple-limbed Nautch girls."

"Cut this foolery short, Colonel Steele, and recollect that you are speaking of a lady."

Clarencourt longed to say *my wife*, and to protect her from further insult, but how could he. Besides, what right had he to think that she would thank him for his interference? Had he not, of his own free will, left her exposed to the ridicule of the world, or at least those

who had ever known of their marriage? No, assuredly he could not reclaim her by such means, and she might hate him the more for it. Boiling with suppressed rage, but outwardly calm, he faced his tormentor.

"Colonel Steele! where does she reside?"

"Ah, that's what you want to know. Well, of course it is but natural." Steele pulled up short; he was certainly none the better for the wine he had imbibed, but he had just sense enough left to wonder whether he was not making a fool of himself, and betraying a secret which, had Ada Devereaux listened to his covert hints as he wished, he would have been the last man to disclose. But no. There was the doubt—and women were all alike. Irresolute for a moment, he looked straight into Gerard's face, and there he read—shrewd man of the world, and heartless, dissipated *roué*; what he hated, and would wish to wound, what he had not and wished to corrupt—*Honour!* Besides he detested this man, and that decided him.

"Where does she reside?" repeated Gerard, breathlessly.

"Well, Clarencourt; I am doing you a devilish good turn, but some day you may serve me by a *quid pro quo*," he added satirically. "Bend closer, we will keep this to ourselves. Listen. Near the river-side, above the bridge, some distance. I have just come from a charming *tête-à-tête* myself." Then he lowered his voice so that only disjointed syllables could be heard. "A child, too; don't know who the devil is the father. *She's* all right. Just like the rest of them. Go in and ——"

"Liar!" broke from Gerard's lips, as he swept him backward with a blow of his clenched fist. There was a crash as of glass smashed into a thousand pieces, a babel of voices, oaths, and expostulations. Gerard stood, pale and panting with passion, in the centre of the room, questions were asked and explanations demanded by those whose peace he had disturbed.

"Gentlemen, I have chastised a cur and a

villain, who has dared to slander a woman, and attempted with his infamous falsehoods to lie away her fair fame. As men of honour, I would ask you to let him see that you at least know how to respect those who are too weak to defend their own characters. There is my card, and should any of you need further explanation you know where to find me."

Calm, now that he had struck down the man who had insulted his wife, Gerard brushed the men on one side, who clustered about him awed by the look of determination they read in his face, and left the club, nearly knocking over, as he stepped into the road, one whom under any other circumstances he would have recognized at a glance—Geoffrey Carelesse. He had dogged Colonel Steele to some purpose; slowly and surely he had tracked him, again and again, to the white-walled cottage where lived all that he prized on earth. Had not this man ruined him?—though it had been in defence of her honour, for which he would have given his life. And

yet Geoffrey Carelesse told himself that he had arrived too late—too late to save her from his clutches, and for his own honest love to be acceptable, but not too late to be revenged. Heavy masses of vapour drifted across the heavens, obscuring the silvery rays of the orb of night, but passing quickly away, urged on by a strong wind that howled midst the rigging of the fisher craft, and hustled with its breath the foam, as it beat and churned in grandeur midst the jagged points and ledges of the reef, as it stretched away seawards. Old, wrinkled-visaged salts, who had plied the oar and the shrimping net in childhood, and as beardless boys had grasped the helm as they drove before a gale off the Cape, left the cheer of their firesides behind them, and groped their way to the beach, fearful that some poor drowning wretch might need aid, for the storm raged pitilessly; and through it all, never weary, never for an instant wavering, stood Geoffrey Carelesse, wrapped in a rough tweed overcoat, and with his teeth clenched on the remains of a cigar that had

long since gone out for want of attention. The fishermen had hauled their boats on to the Esplanade itself, fearful of the rising tide, and dreading lest their little all should be damaged by its violence. To leeward of one of them he waited, watchful, and with his glance fixed on the lighted doorway, through which he had good reason to know Steele must eventually pass. It was a weary vigil, but at length came the figure he looked for and hated with all the strength of his nature. His right hand closed more tightly on the deadly weapon he had concealed about his person. It had been a gift from one who had gone on ahead to the land of shadows, and its silver-mounted hilt had been graven with the letters "G.C." by the love of him who had passed hence. But Geoffrey, as he grasped it and staggered on against the storm, thought of nothing save wreaking his vengeance on the man who had wrecked his life. Whether it was owing to the disturbed state of his mind, to the fact that the fumes of the spirits he had taken had mounted to his brain, or from

any other cause, it is impossible to say, but certain it was that Steele, after walking the whole length of the Esplanade, took the road which led towards the river instead of following that which would have taken him homewards. It was not lost upon Carelesse, who ground his teeth with anger.

"I thought as much—going to *her* side," he muttered, thinking of the little home midst the trees where Ada slept in happy unconsciousness, with her child strained to her breast. He quickened his pace, and with every stride shortened the distance between him and his enemy. The sound of the heavy footstep drawing nearer caused Steele to pause and look round, and at the sight of the face he hated, Carelesse covered the intervening space that separated them, until they faced each other.

"At last we meet, Colonel Steele, where no court-martial shall decide between us."

Steele trembled, he knew not why. Perhaps some secret suspicion entered his heart that the man he had wronged, and laid himself out

to disgrace, had fallen upon him in that lonely road to seek a deadly reparation for the injuries he had heaped upon him, but he thought to brazen it out with haughty insolence.

"I refuse to recognize you. Good-night; our roads lie in different directions."

Carelesse was beside himself. A thousand demons seemed to possess him as he rushed upon his rival.

"Yes, villain! but yours shall not be in the direction of her whom you have wronged. I might have forgiven you all else. But *this*—never! and you shall die the death of a dog." He gripped Steele's throat with all the strength of his left hand, but with a powerful wrench of his neck the colonel freed himself, and for a second as it were, drew back to gather strength. That movement was his death-warrant. The fear lest his vengeance should escape him flashed through Geoffrey's mind, and with the thought the glittering barrel of the revolver steadied for an instant, as he aimed and fired, and Steele, struck full in the forehead, fell head-

long in the road. No sooner had the shot taken effect than the awfulness of the crime he had committed entered the passionate though kindly heart of Geoffrey Carelesse. The weapon fell from his hand, and he knelt beside the prostrate body of his foe. He had encountered death in all its grimness too often on distant fields, where the palms waved and the vulture croaked over the ill-made grave of many a gallant comrade, and he could not mistake it now.

"God forgive me! I have killed him," he moaned, as he raised the heavy, lifeless head, only to let it fall again; "but I loved her, I loved her."

CHAPTER XI.

"HER WORD—HER BOND."

In hot climates, and even in cooler latitudes at times, the pure air of heaven is suddenly impregnated with some loathsome epidemic, whose poisonous breath, in a few days, spreads over whole districts, seizing upon its victims indiscriminately, and leaving behind it a broad track of stricken mortals to mark its course. Nothing travels faster than scandal. The latest bulletins, concerning some great *liaison*, in which people of rank and fashion are implicated, are placed upon our breakfast tables now-a-days, or cried aloud in our main thoroughfares; good or bad, it matters not, it is deemed fit for the public mind. With the earliest streaks of dawn there were strange whisperings going abroad in Sidcombe; something unusual and dreadful

had happened, every one was quite sure of that, and little knots of fishermen paused on their way down to the beach to discuss what some one else had told them, and to wonder what was the right and the wrong of it.

"Come on, mates, be you a goin' to talk all day? Mun, there's fish to be caught. The papers 'll have it off by heart time we comes back to the old woman," remarked one man with more of logic in his composition than his fellows. But to cut a long yarn short, by eight o'clock, when the shutters which protected the windows of the principal grocer's shop had been taken down, all the gossips, who were up and about, knew that a deadly crime had been committed near at hand. The sunlight crept in through the drawn blinds of the dining-room at Clifford's Wood, and weary of watching and waiting for his master's return, Wilson prepared to seek his own quarters, to snatch a nap before the duties of the day commenced. When Gerard was at home Wilson had never in his life retired to rest without knowing that *he*,

the very apple of his eye, was safe within the four walls of the house, and in the simple country existence that Gerard had led, he had found his task an easy one. And so, in following out his custom, the old servant had wandered about the house, seen to all the bolts and bars, and had finally gone into the dining-room, where he had poked the fire, rubbed his eyes, and peered into the gloom, filled with wonder that the figure he looked for came not. Overtaken by sleep, he had dozed, and started up, and dozed again, the whole night through, until the morn had come.

"Sad work has been goin' on, Mr. Wilson; you'll not have heard."

"No. What is it, my lad?" asked Wilson, who had attended to a ring at the bell, which proved to be a summons for admittance from one of the tradesfolk who called regularly for orders.

"Well; there must be some mistake, so I'll tell you the part as is true. There's been a murder hereabouts." The man lowered his voice to a whisper as he spoke, but sturdily

refused to impart further information, though urged by Wilson, into whose heart stole a nameless dread. Of *what*, he knew not.

Lord Goddington blinked at his son through his gold *pince-nez*, across the breakfast table at Breakwood, and exclaimed, in answer to something of evident interest, which the Honourable Jim related at much length and with ill-concealed triumph:

"God bless my soul! You don't mean it. How horrible!"

The same story repeated an hour later by the maid of all work (sole attendant upon Ada Devereaux, by reason of her poverty) caused her mistress to gasp for breath and strive to hide her face, which had suddenly blanched whiter than that menial's apron.

"Lor, mum, let me fetch you somethin'."

But Ada had waved her hand authoritatively, and no sooner had the girl taken herself out of the room, than she had tottered helplessly into the nearest chair, as though a sharp and cruel blow had been dealt her. What was the burden of that tale?

After the *fracas* in the club, Gerard had gone he knew not whither. His rage was as short-lived as a fierce squall of wind, which rises none know where or how, and passes hence as strangely, but the woe which Steele's cruel words had brought into his heart, could not pass so lightly. Through the blinding fury of the storm he wandered aimlessly, his mind oblivious to aught that went on around him. Far out to sea, the huge waves tossed and moaned, and beat against each other, to burst at length in masses of foam upon the beach. Drenched to the skin by the clouds of spray which dashed upon him, he stumbled on over the rough pebbles, seeing but one face, remembering the tones of but one dear voice; and to have possessed her, even at that moment, he felt he could have stooped to shame.

"Oh, God! And has it come to this?" he burst forth through his clenched teeth. "Has it come to this, and *she* my wife? All that was left to me on earth—whose memory at

least I could cherish as pure, and now—and now—defiled by that villain."

As if to mock him, recurred the words of Gounod's song:

"Oh, that we two were maying!"

And then the recollection of the lines:

"Oh, that we two were lying
Under the churchyard sod!"

made him exclaim bitterly:

"Would that we were. Death a thousand times over rather that such a death in life."

How long he paced thus, absorbed by his own miserable thoughts, he knew not, but Steele's words "about the white cottage up the river, beyond the bridge," brought back to his mind the fact that only a mile at most separated them. Such a description, though vague in the extreme, would serve to guide him; and bent upon watching her shadow upon the blind, or the dim light of her candle as it flickered in the room, where she had dwelt so near and yet so far from him, Gerard had set

off to find it. If anything, the storm had increased, and the light that the moon gave forth was pale and uncertain, owing to the flying scud of clouds which still traversed its disc, like mighty phantoms in chase of one another. He had never paused in his rapid walk until he had come to the cottage which his knowledge of the locality told him must be the one tenanted by Ada. How long he spent in gazing up at the darkened windows, and as one in a dream in circumnavigating the creeper-covered walls where he *felt* she was, he never knew; for at such a time a man may well lose count of the moments. But at length he became dimly conscious that he was wet and chilled to the bone, and from sheer force of habit he had turned his steps towards home. Near the bridge, which he was obliged to cross to return to Clifford's Wood, his attention had been attracted by the sight of a prostrate form lying in the mire of the road, and immediately in his path. "Some drunken fisherman who has missed his way, and stumbling, fallen asleep," Gerard

had thought, and yet mindful of the sufferings of others, despite his own great trouble, he had bent over the stranger. The sight that had met his gaze had caused his very blood to curdle. There was light enough to tell him *who* the man was whose head he raised, with nervous tenderness, and a glance at the pale, drawn face, from a tiny mark in the forehead of which the dark life blood trickled, had told him that he stood in the presence of death. His late enemy was beyond mortal aid, and would trouble him no more, but he must be moved, he could not lie there like foul carrion, and gently Gerard had laid the head down again with the thought that he must communicate with the police at once, so that they might have the better chance of bringing to justice the miscreant who had perpetrated so dastardly a crime. How little he suspected that the round puncture, which alone bore witness to the cause of death, was the work of his old school chum, Geoffrey Carelesse! Even had it been light enough for him to see the initials chased in silver which

ornamented the revolver he found lying close to the stricken form, he would never have suspected *him* of being the author of so dark a night's work. He had been about to hurry off for assistance when the concentrated rays of a bull's-eye lantern suddenly shone full in his face, and a rough voice anticipated his intentions.

"Nice work you've been about here, mate," and with the words his shoulder had been grasped by strong fingers.

"Insolent hound! take your hands off," Gerald had exclaimed, while he shook himself free. "I was about to summon you."

"A likely tale. Seize him, Bill."

The glare of the bull's-eye had prevented him from seeing that the figure of another man had darted swiftly behind him, and he felt himself rudely pinioned. Gerard had been calm outwardly then, for instantly flashed through his brain the thought of the dreadful charge that might be preferred against him.

"If you will have the goodness to remove

your grip, I will go quietly. Do you know who I am?"

"No; nor don't want to. Slip the darbys on, Bill."

All the indignity of being handcuffed occurred to him, and losing his temper again as the steel touched his wrists, he had dealt the man nearest him a blow full in the chest, which sent him spinning across the road to measure his length in the ditch hard by.

"Hold on, Bill."

"I've got him, mate."

"I am Gerard Clarencourt, of Clifford's Wood."

"Didst ever hear the like of the imperence of the chap? Look here, young feller. Supposin', just for the sake of supposin', that you wos the Prince of Wales hisself—well, took red-handed like this 'ere, you'd be marched right off to the station. Since you *ain't* him, we takes you all the quicker;" and that was all the explanation that Gerard could elicit from his captors.

So when the yellow dawn of the new day streaked the sky away to the eastward, its beams struggled through the strong iron bars of a certain cell in Sidcombe gaol wherein was Gerard. Geoffrey Carelesse had found his way back to the Greyhound Inn, where his late home-coming aroused not even the faintest suspicion in the mind of the jolly, bluff-featured landlord, who was accustomed to all sorts of "heccentricities," as he termed them, on the part of his guests. The whole night, or what remained of it, was spent by Carelesse in striding about his room in a condition of mind bordering closely upon madness, but with the return of the warm spring sun he became calmer. He heard, without a muscle of his face betraying him, his garrulous host's account of the deed of violence done "under their very noses," as he said, and displayed no more than a natural amount of wonder when he was informed that Mr. Clarencourt, "the squire," as he heard him called, was arrested upon suspicion of having murdered Colonel Steele.

Outwardly he bore it well, but what pen shall attempt to describe the conflicting torrent of thoughts that coursed through his brain. He neither ate nor drank, and to be alone, spent the hours upon the cliffs, or in scrambling along the beach, where the mighty thunder of the waves rang in his ears, but failed to drown his misery, or that one terrible word, which even the sighing of the waters and the rattle of the pebbles, as the surf receded, seemed to re-echo—*murderer*. The sea-birds screamed it forth, and the wind repeated it in low sighs. Should he ever *forget?* he wondered, and in answer fancy bore to his ear the sound of many voices joined in chorus, repeating, *Never! never!* As the afternoon shadows lengthened he determined to seek an interview with Ada Devereaux. He must see her once again, he told himself, and with that intent he opened the latch of the wicket-gate and entered the trim bordered garden, treading softly upon the turf, fearful, he knew not why, that if she

saw him coming, she might deny herself to him. The scent of roses and mignonette filled the air, and the birds chirped and twittered in the ivy. Geoffrey Carelesse paused and looked around him. "What an earthly paradise! — and with *her*" — he muttered, whilst his face darkened as he remembered the man with whom it had been shared (as he believed), and an evil feeling of exultation stole into his heart with the thought, "Come what may, *that* is over." The long French window of the drawing-room was open, and ignoring the usual means of entrance, he passed through it, and stood in the presence of the woman he sought. His approach had been so noiseless that at first she was unaware that her privacy had been intruded upon, and he paused to observe her. She was seated before a writing-table, some of the drawers of which stood open, and her head rested upon her hands, as though she were deep in thought. In reality she was. She had wept with a depth of woe that words

fail to describe, because of the terrible news that the day had brought with it. But Gerard was arrested upon a false charge, and this was no time to shed tears. Each instant was precious, for he must be released from the trap into which he had fallen; but how? Ah! it was that difficult problem she was trying to solve.

"Well; I am come. I suppose I must offer you a thousand apologies for thus announcing myself," began Carelesse, wearied of waiting, while his heart seemed to grow heavier with each tick of the clock, as the thought pressed upon him, "She can never be mine."

"*You* here, Mr. Carelesse!"

"Yes. Have I startled you?"

"Well, since I believed you to be in India——"

"You are surprised to see me?"

"Yes."

He could perceive that her eyes were heavy with weeping, and annoyed and irritated by the sight, he plunged on.

"I have been here for some days past."

"*You!* In England, I suppose," answered Ada, wondering whether the fatal news had reached his ear, and fearful that each moment he would touch upon it. She felt she couldn't bear to hear Gerard's name mentioned by other lips in connection with so foul a deed.

"No; here, in Sidcombe. You recollect my words to you in Calcutta, when I told you that I loved you, and that the man who came between us should rue the day. You have forgotten me and my oath. I have remembered you and those words I used then."

Back to Ada's memory came the scene in her bungalow. The room—his face as she had seen it convulsed by passion—the intensity of which she had dreaded inasmuch as it was possible for her to know aught of fear. She had laughed softly to herself that night, not ten minutes after he had left her, as the sentence he had used recurred to her: "*No man shall rob me of you and live.*" And, after

saying to herself, "How absurd of him! poor fellow; and why *do* men lose their tempers? It is such bad taste, and fatigues one so," she had forgotten them. She was changed indeed now, and often in her solitude had lamented the several parts she had played through life. The hearts she had seared and embittered, the enmities she had created between those who had been sworn friends, who had fought shoulder to shoulder, and shared privations and dangers cheerfully together, until a glance, or a gesture of her hand had made them rivals, when, in reality, she had cared for neither of them. She had sinned, truly, but in loneliness she had deeply mourned.

"Why recall these things, why rake up the past?" she asked at length wearily, whilst her thoughts were all of Gerard. "You have come home again, and you are well; surely, you have cause for gladness."

"Say, rather, curses. See here, Ada Devereaux, I have not come for the purpose of being taunted by you. You might have

spared me your allusions to my home-coming."

"I do not comprehend you," was all that she could utter, as she gazed at him in speechless amazement, at a loss to divine the cause of his anger, and the insinuation contained in his words. Once upon a time she would have ordered him to quit her presence, but her heart was heavy, and she pitied him.

"In a few minutes you will do so. You know that I loved you; that, too, has been as fruitless as the rest of my existence, though my bane and ruin after I went up country with my regiment. Oh, the tale sickens me, and I know not where to begin. Well, that man and I——"

"Who?"

"Can *you* ask me? well, let that pass. Colonel Steele and I hated each other. He took a mean and cowardly advantage of me. You were the subject of the dispute. Don't think that I mention this to raise myself in your estimation. I struck him in the presence of a score of his men, was hauled up

before a court-martial, and here I am. But, now I come to that part of my story which will interest you most. Days ago, I came down here with the intention of seeking Clarencourt, thinking that, perhaps, he could furnish me with news of you. Fate (or the devil, who sticks closely by me) willed that the first person I should encounter on leaving the train, should be none other than my commandant——"

"Deal kindly with the dead. He is not here to refute your charges, therefore spare his memory," interrupted Ada; not liking the ring of satire she detected in his voice.

"Ah! of course, he has your sympathy."

"What do you mean?" she asked, as something of the import of his words struck her.

"Time enough; time enough. You act like yourself and a powerful *rôle* suits you, but do not interrupt me; I shall not detain you long. The moment I saw him, it occurred to me, that *he* was the likely one to know something of your movements. Would

to God my judgment had been at fault! Nay, hear me out, I say. I followed him day and night; I tracked him to this place; I learned *whom* he came to see. You grow pale. Wait. My oath came back to me. He was coming to you, under cover of night."

"It is false. Do you dare——"

"Do not tamper with one as desperate as I am. I tell you he was coming, or what brought him on this road? I dogged his steps and forced him to face me."

Every trace of colour had deserted Ada Devereaux's cheeks; her teeth were clenched, and each hand grasped an arm of the chair in which she sat. Her eyes were riveted upon Geoffrey Carelesse, as though he were the serpent and she the stricken bird. He paused, perhaps it was due to the increasing expression of horror which he read in her face, possibly to her beauty, which even at that moment he could not forget. A struggling gleam of the setting sunlight lingered midst the coils of hair he had loved to think would be one day his own.

Every curve of her figure was limned clearly against the dark velvet of her chair, and as she leant forward, in an attitude of the most eager attention, Carelesse murmured to himself:

"How beautiful, how beautiful! and yet to lose her at the last." Should he withhold all he had to tell? And then came the answer to his thoughts, "What use? She does not love you."

Every second of his silence was keenest suffering to Ada. She knew not what hung upon his confession. Her mouth was dry and her tongue all but failed her; yet, somehow, she contrived to speak.

"Well?"

"You shall hear the rest; it will please you," answered Carelesse, with savage meaning, as his evil nature got the better of him. Before him was no longer his idol, he saw in her only the abandoned minion of his foe. Why should he spare her? "Well, I charged him with his villainy, and his cursed cool tongue drove me to shoot him."

"Thank God, then, my husband is innocent!" broke from Ada's lips.

Carelesse started as though he had been bitten by an adder.

"Your husband?"

"Is charged with the crime you have committed."

"Gerard Clarencourt?"

"Ah, you know it, and you are here. *You*, his friend, could rest while the stain of a great sin rested on the shoulders and soiled the name of him who has never wronged you. Then your last act is worse than the first. I had thought better of you."

She was white as marble now, and that steel blue light that Geoffrey Carelesse had brought into her eyes when he had invaded the sanctity of her bungalow, sparkled as she lashed him with her words.

"You have no right to taunt me. It is you who have brought me to this. *You*, who trifled with me, and made me reckless of aught else but the love I had hoped to win in exchange for my own."

She was silent; she knew his accusation was just, and she answered him nothing. It was the past in pursuit of the present. As she had sown, so must she reap, and she bowed her golden head, and hot tears dimmed her sight. Geoffrey Carelesse saw his advantage, and the grossness of his character rose to the surface. If what she said was true, she was in his power.

"So Clarencourt is your husband. Then, why are you living here alone and known by the name of Devereaux?"

"What right have you to interrogate me? I have said Gerard Clarencourt is my husband. It is enough," she answered with a dash of the old scorn in her voice.

"And you love him?"

"I do."

"Then listen to me. I will keep my oath as far as in me lies. You shall see him no more."

"You dare to threaten me." Her eyes blazed with wrath and her whole form shook, as she started from her chair. "*You*, Geoffrey Care-

lesse! You do not know me yet. I have but to touch this bell and have you dragged where your sense of honour is not strong enough to lead you; where the promptings of your conscience have failed to hound you on to do a simple act of justice. I have but to summon——"

"A woman weaker than yourself. Ha! ha! No, do not trifle with me. You cannot prevent my making good my escape if I choose to do so, and once in London you might set all Scotland Yard to work, and I would defy them. But that does not happen to be what I wish. I am weary of life, sick of it. Without a profession, the weight of crime crushing me, and, last of all, the cause of it, love, and what the world would term (though it would swear there was no such thing) a broken heart. Well, let it laugh; I have done with it, but on these terms only, for I have a good memory. You are the cause of this misery; you, too, must bear the burden."

"And are you blameless? I flirted with

you (encouraged you, I suppose you would call it), when my heart was dead to you. But you pursued me as my shadow, and you amused me. Well, I have sinned, but in doing so have only followed in the footprints of the women of my world. That is all."

"You love Gerard Clarencourt, so be it. That is unalterable, but you must quit England, and before doing so, swear to me never to see his face again, and should you meet, to renounce him as your husband. On these conditions alone I will suffer in his stead, and save him from the punishment I merit. As you have been merciful, so you shall have mercy. I *amused* you ; it is *my* turn now."

His cruel words rang in her ears. To give up the only hope of her life, the one prop that supported her! It would have been kinder to have torn her limb from limb.

"And what if I refuse?"

"Let the law take its course. I shall be careful to keep out of its way. Do you consent?"

The silence which ensued was long. The

birds seemed to twitter more gaily, and the clock ticked louder. A bee hummed as it winged its flight in through the window, round the room and out again, and the tall stems of the larches waved as the wind sighed a chorus to the murmur of the stream through their feathery leafage. Well did she weigh his words ere she spoke. Gerard's life was at stake, and it must be saved. It was that terrible doubt that decided her. Should she refuse, and the police fail to secure Carelesse, what would be the result? Gerard *might* die ignominiously, and there was no one to prove that the conversation of the afternoon was not an invention of her ready wit, a mere allegation without fact to support it.

"Oh, God! is it possible that the sun can shine on one so pitiless? My lover, as he said, and yet he would tear me from my husband."

Ada Devereaux thought this and more, as she wrestled with the agony which welled up in her heart. Was there no hope but that? and she raised her tear-stained face to where

Geoffrey Carelesse stood with his back towards her. The sight stung her to the quick; all the pride of her nature was roused within her. She would never humble herself to him. She would rather die than sue; and though to give Gerard up should rob her of the wish to live, she must do it for *his* sake. Never, to the last day of her life, did Ada Devereaux forget the most trivial circumstance of that moment, when she flung away the straw to which she had clung.

"Mr. Carelesse, I consent to your demands. Please to end this scene and leave me."

Geoffrey Carelesse turned and faced her, and the unspeakable woe which stamped her features might have made him relent, had not the demon of malice possessed him.

"You renounce Gerard Clarencourt, and swear never to live with him as his wife, or to hold any intercourse with him in the future?"

"I have said so. I promise."

"It is enough. You will leave for Paris, and on arrival there you will put in writing

the words you have spoken. On receipt of that letter Gerard Clarencourt shall be set free."

"And what guarantee have I that you will do as you have said?" she faltered.

"The word of a man who stands on the verge of another world. Besides, life has no charms for me, and you would soon know if I played you false. Stay; you have money?"

"Leave me, leave me, for the love of God!" was all she could articulate.

"You cannot scruple to supply your wants since it is through me they are caused. Take this. I shall never need it, and it is the last that belonged to a better man."

As he spoke, Carelesse flung some notes on the table. Silently she pointed toward the window whence he had entered, and without another word he left her. The sound as of many waters rang in her ears, a mist passed before her sight, and Ada Devereaux became unconscious.

CHAPTER XII.

CONSCIENCE STRICKEN.

Time had served to invest the mighty arm of the law with all its terrors. Weeks had fled. Ada Devereaux, in fulfilment of her promise, had long since taken up her abode in Paris, and immediately on her arrival there had despatched the letter Geoffrey Carelesse had required of her, and yet nothing had come of it. Carelesse himself was still to be found at the Greyhound Inn, where he ate little, spoke to no one, and patrolled the cliffs as regularly as the coastguardsmen. Why had he neglected to fulfil his part of the contract, which he had enforced upon a defenceless woman whilst trading upon her love and prating of his firm resolve to keep his vow? Simply because again and again he had postponed the evil day. He had made good resolves

and broken them. He had stifled the small voice which condemned his cowardice, and turned his back upon honour. Despite the cant to which he had treated Ada Devereaux, life was still very dear to him. It was hard to look around and bid good-bye to the things of earth, and voluntarily give himself up to be dealt with as justice should direct—doubly hard when he was exempt from coercion. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; it is one thing to clasp the handcuffs fairly about the wrists of the felon, and another to trust to his honour to deliver himself up. So Gerard Clarencourt lingered yet in prison. He had made but one effort to break down the barrier of false evidence which confined him in a criminal's cell. Through the medium of Wilson, whose faithful heart was wellnigh broken, he had communicated with his mother. The message that had come to him in reply was worthy of her. No love, no sympathy, no aid, only a long rigmarole, in which she had fumed over her outraged pride and the blot, ineffaceable in the eyes of the

world, cast upon her, had alluded to grey hairs, the grave, and, in brief, had mourned not for him but for herself. She should bury her shame, she asserted, by spending the remainder of her life in some secluded spot, while she whispered to herself that her last chance had come, and the estates might yet be hers. Such were her thoughts, such the extent of her sympathy for her son. The effect which her cruelty had upon Gerard it is difficult to describe, since words fail to convey the bitterness which those long days of enforced inactivity had for him, exposed to the cruel censure of the world, and branded with the stigma of a terrible crime. He had none to live for, none to care for him; he had only the memory of *her* for whom he yearned, yet looked upon as lost for ever. And the iron entered his very soul. He had engaged no counsel to fight his cause, and when the day dawned which witnessed his sentence, he listened to the words which condemned him to the most degrading of all deaths with calmness, and

his brave young voice had rung through the court:

"Not guilty!"

And then he had suffered himself to be led once more to his gloomy cell, with the knowledge that, had he chosen to explain the reason *why* he had been abroad so late, and near *her* house, it might have been otherwise with him. But Ada's name should not be the common property of men. She did not love him, but she should not be jeered at, or pitied, as might please the world, for a neglected or a faithless wife. She should not furnish a subject for a nine days' wonder. So the Honourable Jim Ledsham, his chief accuser, had been treated to a look of silent contempt, as Gerard turned his gaze upon him, and refused to give any information on the subject. It wanted but a few hours to the time when he should see his last of earth —when the sun of the morrow should rise, yet not for him; and Gerard sat upright on the miserable bed on which he had sleeplessly passed the hours of darkness.

The feeling of utter loneliness and the lack of that after which his very soul had yearned—love—had had the effect of reducing him to a state of utter hopelessness. His life had been a failure from beginning to end, and the sooner it was over the better, though his brave heart, that had known no fear before, quailed at the thought of being led out in cold blood to face a death as obnoxious as it was unmerited. The wish to live had wellnigh fled, but in place of it had come a calm; and as he watched the ever-increasing rays of light which struggled through the narrow, grated window, and from the few sounds which fell upon his ear tried to single out and determine which were the footfalls of those who would lead him to his doom, there stole a sense of peace into his heart, and with it the thought of a rest beyond the grave. But help was at hand. Steps echoed in the vaulted passage, and drew near to his dungeon; rusty keys rattled, and turned the lock of his prison-door, and he was told, to his amazement, that

he was once more free to breathe the air of heaven, and to go where he would. Long and unceasingly had the good and evil spirits combated with each other in the breast of Geoffrey Carelesse, but virtue had finally triumphed over vice. At the eleventh hour the voice of conscience drowned the power of sin, and the thought of the friend of his boyhood suffering all the horrors of shame and disgrace, of the woman he had professed to love pining in solitude for the husband he had selfishly forced her to resign, had made the criminal view his cowardly conduct in its true light. And at the eleventh hour Geoffrey Carelesse had been man enough to deliver himself up to justice, and earn the release of Gerard Clarencourt.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO LETTERS.

Gerard was once again safe and sound within the walls of Clifford's Wood. The hour was noon. The scene, the dining-room in which Wilson, weary of watching, had been overtaken by sleep on the night when his young master had been arrested. The long windows were flung open, and he sat gazing dreamily into the garden beyond. Though his eyes appeared to follow each varying effect of light and shade, of bright and sombre colouring, as the sunlight fell slantwise on the dense foliage of an aged yew, or lit up with almost painful brilliancy the primly fashioned beds of scarlet geraniums, in reality he was utterly oblivious of all around him.

Where should he go?

That was the question which recurred to his mind with never-failing persistency, and it was that unanswered query which caused more than a mere suspicion of moisture to cloud the vision of those frank blue eyes, coupled as it was with the thought "that none cared whither he went, or when he returned."

"One thing is certain, I must go, and to-day, for to remain here to be condoled with by people who only yesterday believed me guilty of the foulest crime of which a man is capable, is more than I can bear. I should like to have a few words with that scoundrel, Lord Goddington" (the Honourable Jim had succeeded to the title by the sudden death of his father), "and yet I fancy I can forego the pleasure, and perhaps it would be better to do so, for I can forgive him the more readily if we never meet." As he thought thus Gerard rose from his seat and pulled the bell.

"Wilson."

"Yes, Mr. Gerard," replied the old servant who answered the summons.

"See that the orders I gave you are carried out. You have forgotten nothing?"

"No, sir."

"Then sit down in that chair and listen to me. It is my intention——"

"Askin' your pardon, Mr. Gerard, I'd rather stand. It's not for the likes o' me to be sittin' in your presence, and though them devils of lawyers and chaps have insulted you till my blood boils to think of it, I'll not be like a fish out of water. You're your father's son, Mr. Gerard, and he'd not be best pleased if he saw me presumin' and out o' my place."

"Nonsense, man. You have been a true friend to me, and sit you shall, though I place the chair for you myself. I leave for London to-night, and you must stay here and look after things for me. The atmosphere of this place oppresses me. You can join me after a time, but at present you will serve me best by carrying out my instructions."

"I'll do that while there's a drop o' blood

left in me, Mr. Gerard ; but stay here, sir, and brave it out. There's not a soul in the whole country side but what knows as you are innocent."

"Very likely, but——"

"And there's no place like home, Mr. Gerard."

"I agree with you, but I have no home now, and must go and seek one. But what have you in your hand ?"

"Lord love you, Mr. Gerard, my memory must be failin' me with all the troubles as has come of late. It's a note as was brought to the door not twenty minutes ago. Askin' your pardon for forgettin', I'll just run and fetch a salver, sir."

Impelled by some impulse, Gerard seized the letter and tore it open. To scan through the few lines, and the equally brief inclosure it contained, occupied but a short space of time, but the effect of those words upon Gerard was magical. It was as though a storm of doubt and despondency had rolled from his mind, to admit once again the sunshine of

hope. The idea of a life made new by aspirations which might yet be realized, caused his eyes to sparkle, the rich blood to mount to his cheeks, and twice he murmured, "Thank God! thank God!"

Wilson was but ill-prepared for the torrent of orders which a moment later rang in his ears. Gerard started from his seat as though in an instant inactivity were cast to the winds, and in place of it, he had all at once discovered much to do, and little time to do it in. "Go and pack my portmanteau. Fetch me a Bradshaw, and ascertain the exact time, my watch is slow," he exclaimed, as he turned over the pages of that most mystifying of all railway guides, which was handed to him promptly by Wilson.

"Ah; it is as I thought. I have just time to do it if I can catch the express."

"Lor', Mr. Gerard, you fairly takes the breath out o' one's body, you are that sudden. Just you stay here and listen to an old man's advice, as would——"

"Do as you are told. I have not an instant

to lose. I'd give the last sovereign I have to——"

"You'll do best if you goes slow at it, Mr. Gerard; besides, I've lost sight of you once, and you may knock me down, but I'll not do it again."

"Out of my way, you old idiot!" exclaimed Gerard, fairly beside himself with the thought that each second diminished his chance of catching the train. "Get those traps together. I must leave here in ten minutes. Quick, do you hear? And Tops! where the devil is Tops?"

Again he tugged at the bell.

"Wot's hup with master; 'e's took leave of 'is senses, 'e 'as," growled the servant, as he kicked his shins in his haste to attend to the excited summons.

"Tell Tops to get the dog-cart ready, at once," exclaimed Gerard, as the man appeared. "He must be in time for the express. If he does it, tell him there's a guinea for you all round."

The man disappeared double quick, regard

less this time of his bones, and in another moment, Tops and the whole stable yard were in a ferment of excitement.

"I have done all I can, but I must do it, I *must* do it," murmured Gerard, as he carefully placed the mysterious papers, which had caused him to develop his plans so speedily, in his breast pocket. To slip on an overcoat and stick a cigar in his mouth, which he forgot to light, was the work of a few seconds; and then he ascended to his own private apartments. A hasty wrangle with Wilson, who insisted upon following his master despite Gerard's resolution to the contrary—a grating of wheels, and a half-dozen farewells from those who loved him in their hearts and wished him well, and Gerard was off at the best pace of the horse he knew so well how to handle. Somehow, he contrived to secure a ticket, a copy of the *Times*, and with the aid of the guard, to clamber into a first-class carriage, the door of which closed with a crash, and he was *en route* for London.

The express, as it whirled along at the rate

of forty miles an hour, seemed to his mind to crawl. Again and again he rose and paced up and down the carriage of which he was the sole occupant. His thoughts flew too fast for the steam monster, and the journey seemed to be interminable. Once only, and then absently, he glanced through the columns of the neglected newspaper. The sight of a name familiar to him recalled him to himself. It was that of Lilian Fabyn, and it figured in the death list. The advertisement was couched in the ordinary hackneyed parlance, but Gerard read and re-read it without being able to grasp, or *quite believe*, that she whom he last remembered in seeming health and in the full flush of her girlish beauty, was cut off and separated from his life for ever. Should he never again press her hand in his, listen to her gentle voice, or watch the changeful expression of those soft brown eyes which had loved to look upon him so well? Assuredly not, for slowly he realized that the Angel of Death had called her hence to where he, too, must one day follow. And

tears of honest sorrow coursed down his cheeks as he bitterly remembered that another link which had bound him to the quiet and peace of his boyhood, and helped to sweeten many an hour since his return to England, was broken, and had left him yet more alone in the world. What if he had known that she had died loving death for love of him? What if he had known that her last prayer had been for her soul, *and for his?* Arrived in London, his first step was to call a cab and drive to the nearest station where he could join the boat-train for Folkestone. By one of those sudden changes of temperature which are so common in the Channel, night overtook the boat, yet not a summer night, with a placid sea and a brilliant, cloudless moon, but one on which the tough old helmsman who clutched the wheel of a passing homeward-bounder grumbled and growled, as he planted his feet firmly on the deck and strove to keep his course. Down in the cabin of the steamer, Gerard for the hundredth time read the letter which

had caused him to seek French soil with such speed and determination. It was worded thus:

"You will recognize at a glance who wrote the enclosed. She loves you and is worthy of you. Go to her and to your child. You will find them at No. 8, Rue d'Hauteville, Paris. Tell her I release her from her promise.—GEOFFREY CARELESSE."

"*His wife! his child!*" Gerard's eyes swam in a mist of happy tears as he perused the words.

"He might well say that I should recognize who wrote this," he murmured to himself, as by the doubtful light of the cabin lamp he contrived to decipher the terse note Geoffrey Carelesse alluded to, and which was penned in Ada Devereaux's bold hand.

"You wished to have my promise in writing. I keep my word and give it you. Never will I depart from what I have sworn, as I hope for mercy, unless you release me from my vow.—ADA DEVEREAUX.

"No. 8, Rue d'Hauteville, Paris."

Gerard knew the writing; but what could it mean? There was evidently a solemn oath which bound his wife to Geoffrey Carelesse; but what was the nature of it, and whom did it concern? How many times since he left Clifford's Wood had he asked himself that question, and just as often been forced to admit his own inability to solve it? He must wait and hope, but meanwhile his mind was harassed with misgivings and improbable conjectures. He dreaded to think (and yet the idea would come to him) that his evil fortune might pursue him again, and his journey end in utter failure. He felt as though a terrible shroud of mystery enveloped him, and at times his heart recoiled at the thought of what might be, should he dare to pierce it and learn all. His wife was alone too—probably without friends—and in Paris. It made his blood curdle, and a sense of despair steal over him, to contemplate the condition in which he might find her. But the longest lane has its turning, and the clever inventions of modern times—when the electric

light has found its way even into the gloomy staircases and stately chambers of the Tower —renders a trip to Paris the merest trifle. So by noon Gerard had entered the streets of the gay capital, and found without difficulty the house where Ada Devereaux had taken up her abode. By means of some silver judiciously bestowed, he had even, unknown to her, entered the room in which she sat. It was on the third *étage* of a house situated in one of the side streets, within gun-shot of the Boulevards, and in the rapid glance he threw round the apartment, though his whole soul was wrapped up in Ada whose back was was turned towards him, Gerard noticed that the furniture was poor and tawdry. Lace curtains of coarse texture and cheap material, yellow and dingy with dust, were looped back from the windows by broad bands of gaudy ribbons. A few bright-tinted glass ornaments were ranged upon the mantelshelf, above which was a huge mirror profusely gilded. A white marble table, placed in one corner, supported an earthen pot of artificial flowers,

and the walls were hung with coloured prints of a vulgar type. And yet, despite the surroundings which she was powerless to alter, she had carried with her into the poor French lodging house to which her slender purse had compelled her to resort, a certain air of refinement which was stamped upon it by her presence, her books and work, and the touch of her hand which, as if by magic, left its mark upon the bad taste which surrounded her. Gerard took it all in, and his heart rose to his lips.

"Alone in such a place, and through me," he murmured to himself. For he had never ceased to consider his action in having left his wife so hastily, a wrong one. At that moment the ill-fitting flooring creaked beneath his tread, and Ada altered her position slightly, as though she were conscious of the sound. A change overspread Gerard's face. It was as though a cloud of black doubt had suddenly been dispersed and swept away by an irresistible current of feeling which had completely got the mastery over him. He

had entered the room filled with jealousy and misgivings, and he had set his teeth and told himself that he would insist upon an immediate explanation, but he had overrated his own powers of control, and steeled his heart in vain. For a few seconds his eyes dwelt on the form he had learned to love so madly, and then with a low cry he sprang forward and flung his arms about her. The colour went and came in Ada's face like a flame, whilst surprise and emotion prevented her from speaking.

"My wife—my darling," he exclaimed.

"Gerard," she faltered, but the words had scarcely left her lips when through her brain, noxious as some poisonous vapour, flashed the recollection of the scene with Geoffrey Careless and of her oath to him. She seemed to see his face, vindictive with passion, to hear his words and her own reply. She had given her simple promise, but it was sacred, and must be kept, no matter at what sacrifice. Quick as thought she disengaged herself from

her husband's grasp, and placed a table on which were her work things between them. Her action drowned his hopes and wounded him to the quick.

"Why have you sought me?" she said in a low voice.

"To demand an explanation. But you have already satisfied me upon one point. You are cold and callous as ever. Fool that I have been to clutch at the vain hope that you would repent of your cruelty. My days have been a burden to me ever since I looked upon your fair, false face. What right had you to teach me to love you and then to spurn me as you have done?"

Gerard sank into a chair as he spoke and covered his face with his hands. Every syllable as it fell from his lips wounded her sorely. How she longed to throw herself into his arms, to pour into his ear the tale of her suffering and penitence, to whisper to him that he had conquered her, and moulded her into a woman, by the love he had awakened in her very soul. And yet that

oath with which she had bought his life had placed a gulf between them.

"If you love me—if you even *pity* me—leave me; leave me to myself," she moaned; and the request stung him to the quick. He never raised his head, or he might have spared her a greater pain. Her face was blanched to the lips, and her bosom rose and fell, as her pulse beat wildly, and her hand sought the back of a chair for support.

"*Leave you?* Ha, ha! how droll! You don't seem to realize you belong to me. Who brought you here? Whom have I to thank for so kindly sheltering *my wife?* Be he whom he may, since you have condescended to bestow your heart upon him, he might have placed a better roof above your head."

"What do you mean?"

The tone of her voice caused him to raise his eyes, and as his gaze encountered Ada's, frank and innocent, though tinged with the expression of a terrible despair, he answered, "God knows! and may He judge between us.

I came here full of love, full of hope, full of the thought that—that—oh! it maddens me to see you cold and heartless when we might be so happy together. But I will sue no longer. And yet, let me be calm. A few words from your lips will end this scene. Am I to understand that time has failed to make you think more kindly of me? I could claim you, if I chose, for you are my wife, but——"

Cost what it might, she must drive him from her side, and as if to aid her, memory recalled the last time she had seen him; under the larches, by the river at Sidcombe; and the words he had spoken to Lilian rang in her ears, "*She has passed from my life for ever.*" Coldly Ada drew herself up. He was no longer hers to claim, and as he had renounced her then, so must she relinquish him now. At all hazards she must keep *her word.*

"Your wife, but in name only, Gerard. You have come too late—*too late*—and if you care for me, you will leave me to myself."

Gerard's face was stern and pallid as his trembling lips framed an answer.

"Very well, be it so. You have chosen, and we will part, but not before I have seen you settled in some home more suitable to your position. It shall be where you like, and all that I stipulate is that you let me provide you and—and the child, with the comforts to which you have a right. Do you agree to this?"

"Yes! yes! anything, so that you go."

"There is one other point, Ada, and then I will bid you good-bye, it may be for ever. Will you look at this handwriting? It is your own. Explain the meaning of it to me, and the nature of your understanding with Mr. Carelesse."

As he spoke, Gerard handed her the letter she had written to Geoffrey Carelesse, and outwardly calm, though with a sense of loneliness at his heart, he stood and waited for her reply.

"Tell me quick. By what means did you procure this?" she said eagerly, and in

her agitation the paper fluttered from her hand.

"By the same means which gave me that which accounts for my presence here. Would to heaven that the hope it held out had not been so totally without foundation," he added, as he tossed the few lines which had been written and signed by Geoffrey Carelesse upon the table. Ada's fingers closed upon the note. She held it before her, and slowly read each word.

"Do not keep me in suspense. You cannot know what I am suffering. Tell me, in God's name, what does it mean?" said Gerard hoarsely, with his eyes fixed upon the changing expression of her face.

"It means," she whispered—"I will explain everything to you, if you wish it, by and by; but it means, Gerard, that *I love you.*"

He started forward—all the doubt and misery fading out of his face as the gray mist of dawn disperses before the rising sun—and stretched out his longing arms towards her.

"Ada," he cried joyously; "*is* it—*can* it

be true? And when did you learn that life is not worth living without love?"

"From the moment my life was bereft of yours," she answered softly.

And so, amid the rumble of wheels and the hum of voices—whilst the great world of Paris went its way, mindful only of its pleasure and its strife—two hearts went out to each other and were welded for ever into one.

THE END.

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